

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DESPAIR.

THE year had gone on, and the season was at its full height. In the breakfast-room at Sir Francis Netherleigh's house in Grosvenor Square, sat his sister, waiting to pour out the coffee. Ah, how different things were from what they had been in his wife's time!—now so well regulated and so pleasant! Then he had had to wait upon himself at breakfast, to take it alone; now he always found his sister down before him.

Mary was good-looking as ever, her wonderful grey eyes, as Miss Margery used to call them, were not a whit less beautiful; but the light-hearted mirth of early days had given place to a calm, sad seriousness. It could be seen that some great wave of sorrow had passed over her heart and left its traces there for ever. At this moment, as she laid down a letter she had been reading, her face wore an especial air of sadness, somewhat of perplexity. Sir Francis entered.

"I have a letter from Netherleigh, Francis, from Alicè Dalrymple," began Mary, after they had said good morning. "Mrs. Dalrymple has met with an accident, and—but I will read you what she says," she broke off, taking up the letter.

"Selina was driving mamma in a borrowed pony-chaise yesterday; the pony took fright at a passing caravan—a huge thing, Selina says, covered with brooms and baskets and shining tins—ran away, and overturned the chaise. Selina was not hurt, she never is; but mamma has received, it is feared, some internal injury. She asks if you will come down to her, dear Mary. Lose no time; you know how she values you."

"Mistress Selina was driving carelessly, I expect," observed Sir Francis.

"Of course I will go down. But it cannot be to-day, Francis?"

"Not very well," he answered, as he took his cup of coffee from her hand. "What should I do with the people, coming here to-night, without a hostess to receive them?"

For Sir Francis Netherleigh had bidden the great world of London to his house that evening. "Such invitations from him were rare indeed. This was the first he had given since his wife's departure and his mother's death.

"True," observed Mary in answer. "And you also expect that gentleman and his wife, who are just home from India, to lunch here to-day. I will write to Alice and tell her I cannot be with her until to-morrow. Her mother is not so ill, I trust, as to make a day's delay of moment. Perhaps you will go down with me, Francis?"

"I will if I can. I know I am wanted at Court Netherleigh."

"That is settled, then. And now tell me—will the Hopes also be here at luncheon?"

"Yes; I asked them last night to meet the Didnums. As I told you, Mary, the Hopes and the Didnums were great friends when in India."

Although Francis Netherleigh had put away his wife, the intimate relations that had existed between himself and her family had not been interrupted. He was sometimes at Lord Acorn's and at Colonel Hope's, and they were often with him. Mr. Didnum, the head of a vast mercantile house in Calcutta, in constant correspondence with that of Grubb and Howard in London, was an old friend of Colonel Hope, and they were now about to meet at luncheon in Grosvenor Square.

Breakfast over, Sir Francis Netherleigh went to Leadenhall Street as usual, returning in time to receive his visitors—the Didnums and the Hopes. Frances Chenevix, who was staying with her sister, Lady Sarah Hope, made one of the party. "I don't know whether I am expected, or whether I am not, but I shall go," she remarked to Lady Sarah, in her customary careless fashion. And go she did—and had the warmest welcome. Everybody liked gay-hearted Frances Chenevix, who was just as genial as her mother was tart.

The luncheon had been over some little time, and they were all talking together with interest, when a telegram was brought in for Miss Lynn. It proved to be from the Rector of Netherleigh, the Reverend Thomas Cleveland.

"Mrs. Dalrymple has undergone an operation and is in a very low condition. Come to her at once. I am sending also to Leadenhall Street to your brother. She is asking for him."

A message such as this causes confusion. All the company shared it. Sir Francis looked to ascertain at what time they were likely to find a train to carry them to Netherleigh, and found they could just catch one if they started at once. A servant was sent out for the fleetest-looking cab he could see: there was no time to get the carriage round.

Mary Lynn was already seated in the cab, and Sir Francis was shaking hands with Colonel Hope, who had come out to the door, when he remembered the guests bidden to his house that night. It caused him to pause.

"You must stay here and receive them for me, Colonel; be host in my place, and your wife hostess, if she will be so good," he hastily decided. "Explain to everybody how it is: dying wishes must be attended to, you know: and my getting back is, I daresay, out of the question."

"All right," answered Colonel Hope. "Don't wait, or you will lose your train."

"All right," the Colonel had said, and returned indoors, went back to the dining-room and told his wife what was required of them. Lady Sarah stared in perplexity.

"Receive the people to-night!—play host and hostess here, you and I! Why, we *cannot*, Colonel. Did you forget that we dine with those people at Hounslow? It's hard to say at *what* time we shall get back."

Colonel Hope looked a little perplexed too. "I did forget it," he said in his solemn way. "What is to be done?"

"Let mamma be here early and receive them," suggested Lady Frances, ever ready in an emergency. "I will help her."

It was an excellent solution to the difficulty. Mr. and Mrs. Didnum took their departure; and Lady Sarah Hope, accompanied by her sister Frances, entered her carriage and ordered it to Chenevix House. The Colonel walked away to his club.

Lady Acorn was alone when they entered. She listened to the news her daughters told her of her son-in-law's being summoned away, and of the request that she would take his place that night, and receive his guests.

"I suppose I must," said she, in her tart way; "but I shall have to get round to Grosvenor Square at an inconveniently early hour. Something is sure to happen when you want things to go particularly smoothly. She'll let Selina drive her out again, I should think! And now—who do you suppose is here?" continued Lady Acorn.

"How can we tell, mamma?" cried Frances, before Sarah had time to speak. "Is it Mary?"

"It is Adela."

"Adela!"

The Countess nodded. "She and MacIvor arrived here this morning by the Scotch mail. It surprised me, I can tell you. Sandy had an unexpected summons to London, from the lawyers who are acting for him in the action about that small property he lays claim to; and when he was starting from home, nothing would do for Adela, it seems, but she must accompany him."

"Is Harriet come?" asked Lady Sarah.

Court Netherleigh.

‘No. Sandy goes back in a day or two.’

‘And Adela? Does she go back with him?’

‘I don’t know. Sir Sandy says she seems miserable with them, and he thinks she will be miserable everywhere. A fine market she has brought her chickens to, she and her vagaries concluded Lady Acorn with rancour.

‘Where is she?’ asked Frances.

‘Upstairs somewhere, in hiding; Grace is with her. Grace pities her and soothes her just as though she were a martyr—instead of a silly woman who has wilfully blighted her own happiness in life, and entailed no end of anxiety on us all.’

After their short stay in Paris in the spring, where we last saw Lady Adela, the MacIvors went straight to Scotland, avoiding London and the cost that would have attended a London season, which they could ill afford. Adela also shrank from that; she would have quitted them had they sojourned in the metropolis. They took up their abode in the Highlands, in the old castle that was the paternal stronghold of the MacIvors, which was utterly bleak, dull, and remote: and here, for the past three months, Adela had been slowly dying of remorse.

No wonder. Her whole being was filled with the image of her husband; with the longing only to see him again, with bitter, unavailing regret for the past. That one solitary sight of him in Paris, at Mrs. Blunt’s, had revived within her the pain and the excitement, which had been previously subsiding into a sort of dull apathy. The château in Switzerland had been, as a residence, lonely and wearisome; it was nothing, in those respects, compared with this old castle of Sir Sandy’s. At least, Adela found it so. In fact, she did not know what she wanted. She shrank from the bare suggestion of publicity, and she shrank from solitude. She felt herself to be in the position of one whose whole interest in life has departed while yet a long life lies before her: the saddest of all sad positions, and the most rare.

Was it to continue so for ever? Yes, she would wail out in answer, when asking herself the question: at least, for so long as time should last. For there could be no change in it. She had forfeited all possibility of that. The lone, miserable, dreary woman that she was now, must she remain to the end.

She wondered sometimes whether the life would kill her, whether anybody ever died of regret. She wondered whether she could continue to bear it, and live. Existence was becoming cruelly painful, all but unendurable. When she opened her weary eyelids to the dawn of a fresh day, she would moan out a faint prayer that God in His compassion would help her to get through it, and would bury her face on the pillow, wishing she could so bury herself and her misery.

It must not be thought she was encouraged in this state of mind. Lady Harriet MacIvor had become intolerably cross long ago, openly telling Adela she had no patience with her. From her Adela had

no sympathy whatever. Look where she would, not a gleam of brightness shone. Not a gleam would ever shine for her again. Sick at heart, fainting in spirit, it seemed to Adela that any change would be welcome; and when Sir Sandy received a letter one morning, telling him his presence was needed in London, and he announced his intention of starting that same day, Adela said she should go with him.

Lady Harriet did not oppose it. In truth, it brought her relief. Adela was becoming more of a responsibility day by day; and she had held some anxious conferences with her husband as to the expediency of resigning their charge.

"It is the best thing that could have happened, Sandy," she said to him, in private. "Take her over to mamma, and tell her everything. I think they had better keep her themselves for a time."

Hence the unexpected irruption of the Scotch travellers at Chenevix House. Lady Acorn was not pleased. Not that she was sorry to see Adela again, but she had lived in a chronic state of anger with her since the separation; and the accounts written to her from time to time by her daughter Harriet, did not tend to diminish it.

After the briefest interview with her mother, Adela escaped to the chamber assigned her; the one she used to occupy. This left Sir Sandy free to open the budget his wife had charged him with, and to say that just for the present he and Harriet would rather not continue to have the responsibility of Adela. Lady Acorn, as she listened, audibly wished Adela was a child again, that she might "have the nonsense shaken out of her."

Lady Sarah Hope raised her condemnatory shoulders. She had never had the slightest sympathy with the trouble Adela had brought upon herself, or with the remorse it entailed. She had wilfully entered on the thorny road, and must abide by it.

"Will you see her, Sarah?" asked Lady Acorn.

"No, I would rather not. At least, not to-day. I must be going shortly."

Poor Adela! True, she had been guilty of grievous offences, but they had brought their punishment. As we sow, so do we generally reap. This return to her mother's home seemed to bring back all the past sin, all the present anguish in colours ten-fold more vivid.

Kneeling on the floor in the bed-room, her hands clasped round Grace's knees as she sat, Adela sobbed out her bitter pain, her repentance, her hopeless longings for the life and the husband she had thrown away.

"Poor child!" sighed Grace, her own tears falling as she stroked with a gentle hand her unhappy sister's hair, "your sorrow is, I see, hard to bear. If I but knew how to comfort you!"

No answer. Except sobs and blinding tears.

"Yet, Adela, although he is still, in one sense of the word, your husband, it is not well for you to indulge these thoughts, these

regrets. Were there even the most distant hope that things between you would alter, it would be different ; but I fear there is not."

"I *know* there is not," bewailed Adela. "What he did, he did for—for ever. In that lies the sting."

"Then you should no longer, for your own peace' sake, dwell upon his memory."

"I saw him in Paris. Did you know it?"

"Harriet mentioned it in one of her letters. Try and forget him. It seems curious advice, Adela, but I have none better to give."

"I *can't* forget him. He is my husband, and how can I? My dreams by night, my thoughts by day, are of him, of him alone. If I could but be with him for just one week of reconciliation, to show him how I would if possible atone to him, to let him see that my repentance is true and bitter, though he put me away again at the end, it would be something. Oh, Grace, you don't know what my remorse is—how hard a cross I have to bear!"

She lay there in her bitter distress. Not much less distressing was it to Grace. By dint of coaxing—Lady Acorn would have applied scolding—Adela was at length partially calmed, and lay back, half exhausted, in an easy chair.

At lunch time, for this had occurred in the morning, she refused to go down or take anything, saying she could not eat. In the afternoon, when Grace was back again, Davvy brought up a cup of chocolate and some toast. Whilst taking this in a languid manner, her usual manner now, Adela abruptly renewed the subject: the only one, as she truly said, that ever occupied her mind.

"Do you see him often, Grace?"

"Rather often," replied Grace, knowing that the question must refer to Sir Francis.

"He is friendly with you, then?"

"Quite so. The friendship has never been interrupted. We are going to his house to-night," she added, perhaps incautiously.

"To *his* house? To Grosvenor Square?" cried Adela, leaning forward in the large chair, and putting down her chocolate.

"Yes. I think it is the first entertainment he has given since you left it. The first, at any rate, on a grand scale. Half London will be there."

"If I could but go!" exclaimed Adela, a flush rising to her pale cheek. Grace looked at her in surprise: she had forfeited the right even to enter there. Grace made no comment, and a pause ensued.

"Did you read the speech he made last Thursday night to the Commons?" resumed Adela, in a low tone.

"Yes. Everyone was talking of it. Did *you* read it, Adela?—up in Scotland?"

Grace received no answer. Sir Sandy below could have told her that Adela would seize upon the *Times*, when it arrived, with feverish interest, to see whether any speech of her husband's was quoted in it.

If so, Sir Sandy's belief was that she learnt it by heart, so long did she keep the paper.

The chocolate taken up again and finished, she lay back in the chair, her eyes looking into vacancy, her listless hands folded before her. Grace, sitting opposite, ostensibly occupied with some work, for she was rarely idle, had leisure to note her sister's countenance. It was much changed. Worn, wan and weary it looked, but there was no special appearance now of ill health.

"You are much better, are you not, Adela?"

"Oh, I am very well," was the languid rejoinder.

"Do you like Scotland?"

"I don't know."

Grace thought she was tired after the night journey, and resolved to leave her to silence; but an interruption occurred. Frances came in.

And, that Frances Chenevix could put her face into a mournful form for more than a minute at any time, was not to be expected. In spite of Adela's evidently low state of mind, she, after a few staid sentences, ran off at a gay tangent.

"What *do* you think, Gracie?" she began. "We had very nearly lost our party to-night—one, Adela, that your whilom husband gives. He and his sister have been telegraphed for this afternoon to Netherleigh. Poor Mrs. Dalrymple has met with some serious accident; there has been an operation, and the result is, I suppose, uncertain. They have both started by train, and therefore cannot be at home to receive the people."

"Is the party put off, then?" questioned Grace.

"No, there was not time: how could he send round to all the world and his wife? It is to take place without him, mamma playing host in his absence."

"I wonder what Mrs. Dalrymple could want with him?"

"Just what I wondered, Grace. Mamma thinks it must be to speak to him about her affairs. He is her executor, I believe: not, poor woman, that she has much to leave."

Adela had lifted her head, listening to this in silence: an eager look was dawning on her face.

"Do you mean to say, Frances, that he—that my husband—will not be there at all?—in his own house?"

"Of course I mean it, Adela. He cannot be in two places at once, here and at Netherleigh. He and Mary Lynn have but now started on their way thither. I tell mamma that while she plays host I shall play hostess. Won't it be fun!"

Little did Frances Chenevix dream of the fruit these words were to bear—of the trouble they would bring forth. A small, passing trouble, it is true, nothing more, and one that left no consequences behind it.

"Grace," began Adela very quietly, after her sisters had left, for Lady Sarah, thinking better of it, came up to see her for a moment, "I shall go with you to-night."

"Go—where did you say?" questioned Grace, in doubt.

"To my husband's house."

Grace dropped her work in consternation. "You cannot mean it, Adela."

"I do mean it. I shall go."

"Oh, Adela, pray consider what you are saying. Go *there!* Why, you know that you must not."

"It was my house once," said Adela in agitation.

"But it is yours no longer. Pray consider. Of all people in the world, you must not attempt to enter it. It would not be seemly."

Adela burst into tears. "If you knew—if you knew how I long for a sight of it, Gracie," she gasped, her tone one of imploring prayer, "you would not deny me. Only just one little look at it, Gracie dear! What can it matter? *He* is not there."

How Grace, who had a tender heart, would have contrived to combat this wish, cannot be told: but Lady Acorn came in. In answer to her quick questioning of what Adela was crying about now, Grace deemed it well to tell her.

"Oh," said the Countess, taking up the affair lightly; nay, rather jocosely, for truly she did not suppose Adela could be in earnest. "Go *there*, would you! What would the world say, I wonder, if they met Lady Adela Netherleigh at that house? Don't be silly, child."

What indeed! Adela sighed and said no more. But yet, she did so want to go. Lying back in her chair, her thoughts busy with the past and present, the longing took a terrible hold upon her.

She dressed, but did not go down to dinner, refusing that meal as she had refused luncheon: she could not eat any if she went down, was all she said. But that Lord Acorn was away from home for a few days, Grace might have thought she shrank from sitting at table with her father.

Lady Acorn went straight from the dinner-table to Grosvenor Square, calling on her way at Colonel Hope's for her daughter Frances, as had been arranged. Grace, who did not care to leave Adela alone for too long an evening, would go later with Sir Sandy. She hastened to dress, not having done so for the party before dinner, and then went to her sister's room to remain with her to the last moment.

But when Grace got there, she found, to her dismay, that Adela *was prepared to go also*. Her fan lay on the table, her gloves beside it.

"Adela, indeed you must not!" decisively spoke Grace. "Only think how—how—I said it this afternoon—*unseemly* it will be."

"If you only knew how I am yearning for it," came the piteous answer, and Adela entwined her wasted arms entreatingly about her sister. "My own home once, Gracie, my own home once! I seem to be dying for a sight of it."

Never had Grace felt so perplexed, rarely so distressed. "Adela,

I *dare* not sanction it; dare not take you. What would be said and thought? Mamma ——”

“You need not take me; I don’t wish to get you into trouble with mamma. Davvy can tell them to get a cab. Grace, you have no right to oppose me,” went on Adela in a low, firm tone: “what right can you have? My husband will not be there, and I must see my old home. It may be the last time I shall have the chance of it.”

Sir Sandy’s step was heard outside in the corridor, passing to his chamber. Grace opened the door, and told him of the trouble. He put his little head inside and said a few words to Adela in his mild way, begging her not to attempt to go; and then went on, to his room.

“I must go, Gracie; I *must* go! Oh, Gracie, don’t look harshly at me, for I am very miserable.”

What was Grace to do? She had rarely been in such perplexity. A little more coaxing and combatting, and she yielded in very helplessness. How could she help it? The conviction lay upon her that if she refused to the end, Adela would certainly go alone. When an ardent desire, such as this, takes possession of one weakened in spirit and in health, it assumes the form of a fever that must have its course.

The contention delayed them, and it was late when they went down to the carriage. Little Sir Sandy took his seat in it opposite Grace and Adela.

“I wash my hands of it,” he said, amiably. “Please do not let your mother put the blame of it upon me, Lady Adela, and tell me I ought not to have brought you.”

A few minutes, and the carriage stopped in Grosvenor Square. Other guests were entering the house at the same time. Adela shrank behind Grace and Sir Sandy and was not observed in the crowd. Her dress was black net, as it had been at Mr. Blunt’s, though she was not in mourning now; she kept her thin black burnous cloak on and held it up to her face. She passed close to Hilson. The man stepped back in astonishment, recollected himself, and saluted her with an impassive face.

Keeping in the shade as much as was possible, shrinking into corners to avoid observation, Adela lost the others. She heard their names shouted out in a louder voice than Hilson’s, “Lady Grace Chenevix and Sir Sandy MacIvor,” and she lingered behind looking about her.

How painful to her was the sight of the old familiar spots! She turned into a small niche and halted there; her heart beating too painfully to go on. No, she should not be able to carry this expedition out; she saw now how wrong and foolish it was to attempt it: she had put herself into a false position, and she felt it in every tingling vein.

Just one peep she would give at the drawing-rooms above. Nobody

would notice her. Amid the crowds pressing in, for the people were in the full flow of arrival, she should escape observation. Just one yearning look, and then she would turn back and escape the way she came.

This was a favourable moment. Three or four people in a group, strangers to her, were passing upwards. Adela glided on behind them. Their names were shouted out as her sister's and Sir Sandy's had been; as others were; and she stole after them within the portals.

But only to steal back again. Nay, to start back. For a too well-remembered voice had greeted the visitors. "I am so glad to see you," and a tall, distinguished form stood there with outstretched hands: the voice and form of her husband. Later, she knew how it was. The faintness succeeding to the operation (a very slight one), which had alarmed Mrs. Dalrymple herself and also in a degree the surgeon and the Rector, had passed off, and she was really in no danger. So that when Sir Francis learnt this on his arrival at Netherleigh, he found himself at liberty to return.

Feeling as if she must die in her agony of shame, shame at her unwarrantable intrusion, which the unexpected sight of her husband brought home to her, Adela got down the stairs again unseen and unnoticed, and encountered Hilson in the hall.

"Can I do anything for you, my lady?—can I get you anything?" he asked, his tone betraying his compassion for her evident sickness.

"Yes," she said, "yes:" and she absolutely put her hand on his arm for momentary support, feeling that she must faint and fall. "I want to go home; I find I am not well enough to stay: perhaps one of the carriages outside would take me?"

"Can I assist you, Lady Adela?" said a voice at her side, from one who was then entering and had overheard the colloquy: and Adela turned to behold Gerard Hope.

"Is it you?" she faintly cried. "I thought you were abroad, Gerard. Are you making one of the crowd here to-night?"

"Not as a guest. These grand things no longer belong to me. I am in England again and at work—a clerk in your husband's house, Lady Adela; and I have come here to-night to see him on a matter of pressing business."

Hilson managed it all. An obliging coachman, then setting down his freight, was only too willing to take home a sick lady. Gerard Hope and Hilson both went out with her.

"Don't say to—anyone—that I came, Hilson," she whispered as she shrank into a corner of the carriage: and Hilson discerned that by "anyone" she must especially mean Sir Francis Netherleigh.

"You may depend upon me, my lady. Chenevix House," he added to the friendly coachman: and closed the door on the unhappy woman who was once his master's indulged and idolized wife.

"How sadly she is changed!" thought Gerard, gazing after the carriage as it bowled away. "Hilson," he said, turning to the butler,

"I must see your master for a minute or two. Have you any room that you can put me into, away from this crowd?"

"There's the housekeeper's room, sir: if you don't mind going there. It's quite empty, I believe."

"All right. Tell Sir Francis I bring a note from Mr. Howard. Something important, I believe."

Sir Francis Netherleigh had encountered Gerard Hope in Calais, when passing through it the last time he came down from the French capital. Gerard then convinced him, and with truth, that he was totally innocent of the offence which his uncle, the Colonel, believed him guilty of, and which, combined with a few debts, had been keeping him in exile. Sir Francis, ever considerate and generous, paved the way for Gerard's return; that is, he advanced money for the most pressing of the creditors, and offered Gerard a post in his house in Leadenhall Street.

And when Colonel Hope got to know of this, he grew desperately angry, and accused Sir Francis of turning himself into a refuge for the ill-doing destitute.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VISITORS AT MOAT GRANGE.

THE time went on: autumn weather came in: and we must pay a visit to Netherleigh.

Things were almost coming to a revolt: never were poor tenant-farmers so ground down and oppressed as those on the estate of Moat Grange. Rents were raised, fines imposed, expenses, properly falling on landlords, refused to be paid or allowed for. Oscar Dalrymple, the present owner, was ruling with a hand of iron, hard and cruel.

At least, Oscar got the credit of it. In point of fact he was perhaps a little ashamed of the existing state of things, and would have somewhat altered it if he could. A year ago Oscar had let the whole estate to a sort of agent, a man named Pinnett, and Pinnett was playing Old Gooseberry with everything.

That was the expressive phrase the indignant people used. They refused to lay the blame on Pinnett, utterly refused to recognise him in the matter; arguing, perhaps rightly, that unless he had Mr. Dalrymple's sanction to harsh measures he could not exercise them, and that Mr. Dalrymple was, therefore, alone to blame. Most likely Oscar had no resource but to sanction it all, tacitly at any rate.

As to the Grange itself, the mansion, it was now the dreariest of the dreary. That not having been let with the estate, Oscar and his wife still lived in it. Two maids were kept, and a man for out-door work—the garden and the poultry. Most of the rooms were locked up. Selina would unlock the doors sometimes and open the shutters; and pace about the lonely floors, and wish she had not

been guilty of the folly which had led to these wretched retrenchments. Things, indoors and out, were getting worse day by day.

One morning Mr. Lee called at the Grange: a respectable man, whose name you cannot have forgotten. He had rented all his life, and his father before him, under the Dalrymples.

"Sir," he began to Oscar, without any circumlocution, "I have come up about that paper which has been sent to me by Jones, your lawyer. It's a notice that next Michaelmas, when my lease will expire, the rent is to be raised."

"Well?" said Mr. Dalrymple.

"A pound an acre. *A pound an acre*," repeated the farmer with increased emphasis. "Jones must have made a mistake, sir."

"I fancy not. But Jones is not my lawyer, you know; he is Mr. Pinnett's."

"We don't want to have anything to do with Mr. Pinnett, or to hear his name, sir. I have always rented under the Dalrymples; and I hope to do it still, sir, with your leave."

"You know, Lee, that Pinnett has a lease of the whole estate. What he proposes is no doubt fair. Your farm will well bear the increased rent he means to put on it."

"Increased by a pound a acre!" cried the farmer, in his excitement. "No, sir; it won't bear it, for I'll never pay it."

"I am sorry for that, Mr. Lee, because it will leave Pinnett only one alternative: to substitute in its place a notice to quit."

"To quit! to quit the farm!" reiterated Mr. Lee, in his astonishment. "Why, it has been my home all my life, sir, and it was my father's before me. I was born on that farm, Mr. Dalrymple, years and years before you ever came into the world, and I mean to die on it. I have spared neither money nor labour to bring it to its present flourishing condition."

"My good sir, I say as you do, that the land is flourishing; sufficiently so to justify the advanced rent Pinnett proposes. Two of you were here yesterday on this same errand—Watkins and Bumford."

"They have spent money on their farms, too, expecting to reap future benefit. You see, we never thought of Mr. Dalrymple's dying young, and —"

"Are you speaking of young Robert Dalrymple?"

"No, no, poor fellow; of his father. Mr. Dalrymple did die young, so to say; you can't call a man under fifty old. His death, and his son's close upon it, brought you, sir, to rule over us, and I am sorry to say your rule's a very hard one."

"It will not be made easier," curtly replied Oscar Dalrymple, who was getting angry. "And I will not detain you longer, Mr. Lee," he added, rising. "Your time is valuable."

"And what is to be my answer, sir?"

"It no longer lies with me to give an answer, Lee, and I must request that you do not refer to me again. Pinnett's answer will no

doubt be that you must renew the lease at the additional rent demanded, or else give up the farm."

Farmer Lee swung away in a passion. In turning out of the first field he met two ladies : one young and very pretty, the other getting to look old ; her thin features were white, and her hair was grey. They were Mrs. Dalrymple and Mary Lynn. Close upon Mrs. Dalrymple's recovery from her accident, which turned out to have been not at all formidable, she caught a violent cold ; it laid her up longer than a cold had ever laid her up before, and seemed to have tried her greatly. Mary Lynn had now just come again to Netherleigh to stay a week or two with her.

"Is it you, ma'am !" cried the farmer, touching his hat. "I'm glad to see you out again."

"At one time I thought I never should come out again," she answered ; "I am very weak still. And how are you, Mr. Lee ?"

"Middling, ma'am. Anything but well just now, in temper." And the farmer touched upon his grievances, and spoke of the interview he had just held at the Grange, and of its master's harshness.

"Is it right to us, ma'am ?" he wound up with. "Is it just, Miss Lynn ?" turning to that young lady. "Ah, if poor young Mr. Robert had but lived ! We should have had no oppression then."

Mary turned away her face, blushing almost to tears with unhappy remembrances. Robert ! Robert !

"I do believe it will come to a revolt !" said the farmer to Mrs. Dalrymple. "Not with us tenants ; you know better than to think that likely, ma'am ; but with those people at the cottages. They are getting ripe for it."

"Ay," she answered, in a low, grieved tone. "And the worst of it, Mr. Lee, the worst to me is, that I am powerless for help or remedy."

"We cannot quite think—it is impossible to think or believe, that Mr. Oscar Dalrymple should have put all control out of his power. Therefore, his refusing to interfere with Pinnett seems all the more harsh. You must see that, ma'am."

"I have no comfort, no advice to give," she whispered, putting her hand into Mr. Lee's as she turned away. For Mrs. Dalrymple could not *bear* to speak of the existing state of things, the trouble that had come of Selina's folly and Oscar's rule.

Yet Oscar was kind to her. Continuously so. In no way would he allow her income, that which he allowed her, to be in the slightest degree diminished. He pinched himself, but he would not pinch poor Mrs. Dalrymple. Over and over again had she wished Reuben to leave her, but Oscar would not hear of it. Neither, for the matter of that, would Reuben. He did not want wages, he said, but he would not desert his mistress in her premature old age, her sickness, and her sorrow. A small maid only was kept in addition to Reuben ; and the man had degenerated (as he might have called

it but for his loyalty) to little better than a man-of-all-work. He stood behind the ladies now at a respectful distance, having stopped when they stopped.

The grievance alluded to by Mr. Lee, ready to ripen into open revolt, had nothing to do with the tenant-farmers. It was this. In a favourable position on the estate as regarded situation, stood a cluster of small dwellings. They were for the most part very poor, some of them little better than huts, but they commanded a lovely view. They were inhabited by labourers employed on the land, and were called the Mill Cottages: a mill, done away with now, having formerly stood close by.

One fine day it had struck the new man, Pinnett—looking about here and there to discover if he could find means of adding to the profits he meant to make off the land—that if these cottages were taken down and handsome dwellings erected in their place, it would be a great improvement, pecuniarily and artistically, for such houses would let directly in this picturesque locality. No sooner thought of than resolved upon. Miles Pinnett was not a man to linger over his plans, and he gave these small tenants notice to quit.

It was rebelled against. Some of the men had been in the cottages as long as Farmer Lee had been in his farm, and to be ordered to leave seemed a terrible hardship. What no doubt increased the difficulty was, that there were no other small dwellings on the estate the men could go into: all others were already occupied: and if they left these they must go to a distance whence they would have a two or three miles' walk to their day's work. And so, encouraged perhaps by the feeling pervading the neighbourhood, of sympathy with them and want of sympathy with Pinnett, the men, one and all, refused to go out. The next step would be ejectment; and it was looked for day by day.

For all this, Oscar Dalrymple suffered. Suffered in opinion. Pinnett *could not* go the lengths he was going, oppress them as he was oppressing, against the will of the owner, Mr. Dalrymple, argued the community, rich and poor. Perhaps he could not. But how it really was, no one knew, or what power Mr. Dalrymple had put out of his own hands, and into Pinnett's, when he leased him the demesne.

Farmer Lee's visit to Moat Grange was paid in the morning. In the afternoon the Grange had another visitor—Lady Adela Netherleigh.

Adela had not lingered long at her mother's in London. After a few weeks' sojourn she came down to Netherleigh Rectory, invited by the Rector and his wife, her sister Mary. They had come to London for a day, had been struck with compassion at Adela's evident state of mental suffering, and they asked her to return with them for a little change.

"It is not change I want," she had answered, speaking to Lady

Mary. "What I want is peace. Perhaps I shall find it with you, Mary, at the Rectory."

Lady Mary Cleveland hesitated. Peace? The word posed her.

"Adela," she said, "we should be very glad to have you, and there's plenty of room for you and Davvy. But, as to peace—I don't know about that. The Rectory is full of children great and small, and I'm afraid it is in a noise and bustle from morning till night."

Adela smiled faintly. The peace her heart craved for was not that imparted by the absence of noise. She might feel all the better for having the bustle of children about her; it might draw her at moments out of her own sorrow. But another thought struck her.

"My—" husband, she had been about to say, but changed the words. "Sir Francis is not staying at Court Netherleigh?—is he?"

"No. It is said he means to take up his abode there later; he is not there yet."

"Then I will come to you, Mary. And I will stay with you for months and months if I like it—and you must accept from me towards your housekeeping what Sir Sandy and Harriet did."

Lady Mary winced a little at that, but she did not say no. With all those children—she had two of her own now—and the Rector's moderate income, they could not be rich.

So Adela and Davvy went down with them to Netherleigh. That was a month or two ago now: and, so far as could be seen or judged, the change had not as yet effected much for her. Adela seemed just as before: wan, weary, sick and sorry.

And yet, there was a change; a change in a certain degree. The bitter rebellion at her fate had partly passed from her mind, and therefore its look had left her face. The active repining in which her days had been spent was giving place to a sort of hopeless resignation. She strove to accept her punishment, strove to bear it, to be patient and gentle always, hardly ever ceasing day or night to beseech God to blot out the past. The sense of shame entailed by her conduct of long years, had not lifted itself one iota; nay, it seemed to grow of a deeper scarlet as time went on. Sometimes she would think if she could trample upon herself, and annihilate all power of remembrance, she would do it gladly: but that would not stamp it out of her ever-living soul. Adela had erred; wilfully, cruelly, persistently: and if retribution ever came home to a woman, it surely had come to her.

On this same day, a very fine one, when the sky was blue and the afternoon sun lay on the green fields at Netherleigh, Lady Adela went out, and turned her languid steps towards Moat Grange. Selina had called to see her at the Rectory several times: each time Adela had promised to return visits, and had not yet done so.

The direct road lay, as the reader may perhaps remember, through the village and past Court Netherleigh. Lingeringly would her eyes look on the house whenever this happened; lingeringly they rested

on it now. The home, in which she had spent so many happy days with Aunt Margery, was closed to her for ever. Of all people in the living world, she was the only one debarred from entering it. Very rarely indeed was Sir Francis at Netherleigh. It had been supposed that he meant to take up his abode in it for the autumn months: but this appeared to be a mistake: when he did come it was but for a flying visit of a few hours. Mr. Cleveland privately told his wife that he believed Francis stayed away from the place because Adela was in it.

Selina was in the larger of the two drawing-rooms when Adela reached the Grange. Selina rarely used it now, her husband never, but she had gone into it this afternoon. Opening the shutters and the window, she sat there making herself a lace collar. The time had gone by when she could order these articles of a Madame Damereau, and pay a fabulous price for them.

Adela untied her bonnet strings and took off her gloves as she sat down opposite Selina. Not strong now, the walk had greatly tired her. Selina could but notice how fragile and delicate she looked, as the light from the window fell upon her face. The once rounded cheeks were wasted, their bright colour had faded to the faintest tinge of pink; from the once lustrous eyes shone only sadness.

"Let me get you something, Adela," cried Selina, impulsively. "A cup of tea? I will make it for you directly. Of wine—well, I am not sure, really, that we possess any. I can ask Oscar."

"Not anything, not anything," returned Adela, "I could not take it. Thank you all the same. As to my looks—I look as I always do."

"Ah me," sighed Selina, "it is a weary life. A weary life, Adela, for you and for me."

"If that were all—its weariness—it might be borne," murmured Adela: "and yet I do try to bear," she added, pushing her pretty brown hair from her aching brow, and for once induced to speak of her troubles to this friend, who had suffered too—though not as she had. "But there is the remorse as well, you see. Oh, how wrong, how foolish, how *wicked* we were!—at least *I* was. Do you ever think of our past folly, Selina?—of the ease and happiness we then held in our hands, and flung away?"

"We have paid for it," said Selina. "Yes, I do sometimes think of the past, Adela; and then I wonder at the folly of women. See to what folly has reduced me!—to drag on a dead-alive existence in a semi-prison: for the Grange is no better now, with never a friend to stay with me, or a shilling to spend. And all for the sake of a few fine bonnets and gowns! Would you believe it," she added, laughing, "that the costly things have not come half to an end yet?"

"Just for *that*?" dissented Adela, in her pain, and losing sight of Selina's trouble in her own. "If it had been for nothing more than that!"

"Well, well, we have paid for it, I say. Paid bitterly and cruelly."

"I have. You have not."

"No?" somewhat indifferently returned Selina, her attention partly given to her lace again, for she was never serious long. "How do you make that out?"

"You have your husband still. Poverty with him, with one we love, must carry little sting. But for me—my whole life is one of never-ending loneliness, without a future, without hope. Do you know what fanciful thought came to me the other night?" she went on, after a pause. "I have all kinds of fanciful ideas when I sit alone in the twilight. I thought that life might be so much happier if God gave us a chance once, during its course, of beginning it all over again from the first. Just once, when we found out what dreadful mistakes we had been making."

"And we should make the same again, though we began it fifty times over, Adela. Unless we could carry back with us our dearly-bought experience."

Adela sighed. "Yes, I suppose so. God would have ordered it so had it been well for us. He knows best. But there are some women who seem never to make mistakes, who go on their way smoothly and happily."

"Placing themselves under God's guidance, I imagine," returned Selina. "That's what my mother says to me, when she lectures me on the past."

Adela's eyes filled with tears. "Yes," she murmured, in meekness, recalling that it was what she had been striving to do for some little time now—to hold on her way, under submission to God.

Their conversation turned into other channels, and by-and-by, when Adela was rested, she rose to leave. Selina accompanied her into the hall.

"Won't you just say how d'ye do to my husband," she cried, opening the door of their common sitting-room. "He is here."

Adela made no objection, and followed Selina. Oscar was standing in the bay window, facing the door. And someone else, towering nearly a head above him, was standing at his side.

Sir Francis Netherleigh.

They stood, the husband and wife, face to face. With a faint cry, Adela put up her hands, as if to ward off the sight—as if to bespeak pardon in all humility for herself, for her intrusion, and disappeared again, whiter than death. It was rather an awkward moment for them all. Selina disappeared after her, and shut the door.

"Is Lady Adela ill?" asked Sir Francis of Oscar, the question breaking from him involuntarily in the moment's impulse—for she did, indeed, look fearfully so.

"Ay," replied Oscar, "ill with remembrance. Repentance has made her sick unto death. Remorse has told upon her."

But Sir Francis said no more.

Adela had departed across the fields with the best speed she could command. About half-way home she came upon Mr. Cleveland, seated on a stile and whistling softly.

"Those two young rascals of mine"—alluding to two of his little sons—"seduced me from my study to help fly their kites," he began to Adela. "Here I follow them, to the appointed field, and find them nowhere, little light-headed monkeys!—But, my dear, what's the matter with you?" he added, with fatherly kindness, as he remarked her pale, troubled face. "You look frightened."

"I have just seen my husband," she panted, her breath painfully short. All the old pain that she had been striving to subdue had come back again; the sight of him, whom she now passionately loved, had stirred all the distressing emotion within her.

"Well?" said Mr. Cleveland.

"Did you know he was at Netherleigh?"

"He came down to-day."

"He was in the bay parlour with Oscar, and I went into it. It—it has agitated me."

"But why should it agitate you?" rejoined the old Rector, who was very matter-of-fact. "It seems to me that you ought to accustom yourself to bear these chance meetings with equanimity, child. You can scarcely expect to go through life without seeing him now and then."

Adela bent her head and broke into sobs. Mr. Cleveland laid his protecting hand upon her shoulder.

"My dear, my dear! Strive to be calm. Surely a momentary sight of him ought not to put you into this state. Is it that you dislike him so much still?"

"Dislike him!" she exclaimed, the contrast between the word and the truth striking her painfully, and causing her to say more than she would have said. "I am dying for his forgiveness; dying to show him my remorse; dying because I lost him."

The Rector did not quite see what answer would be suitable to this. He held his tongue, and Adela resumed.

"I wish I were a Roman Catholic!"

The good man, evangelically Protestant, felt as if his grey hair were standing on end with surprise. "Oh, hush!" said he. "You don't know what you are saying."

"I do wish it," she sobbed. "I could go into a convent then, and find peace."

"Peace!" echoed Mr. Cleveland. "No, child, don't let your imagination run away with that notion. It is a false one. No woman, entering a convent in the frame of mind that you seem to be entertaining, could expect peace, or find it."

"Any way, I—I should feel more at rest. I should *have* to bear life then, you know. And, oh, I was trying to do so: I was indeed trying!"

Thoroughly put out, the Rector made no comment. Perhaps would not trust himself to make any.

"I suppose there are no such things as Protestant convents, or sisterhoods," she went on, "that receive poor creatures who have no longer any place in this world?"

"Not to my knowledge," sharply replied Mr. Cleveland, as he jumped off the stile. "It is time we went home, Adela."

They walked away side by side. Gaining the Rectory—a large, straggling, red-brick building, its old walls covered with time-honoured ivy—Adela ascended to her chamber, and shut herself in with her grief. She was wondering whether any other living woman could have entailed upon herself so much unhappiness, had blighted her life as she had blighted hers. Put away from her husband! Put away from him for ever and for ever!

How he must despise her!—despise her for her past shame and sin! despise her in her present contemptible humiliation! she reflected, a low moan escaping her,—he so pure and upright in all his ways, so good and generous and noble! Oh that she could hide to the end, from him and from the world!

Lifting her trembling hands and her despairing face, Adela breathed a faint petition that the Most High would be pleased to vouchsafe to her somewhat of His heavenly comfort, or else take her out of the tribulation that she could so little battle with.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ALARM.

IT WAS a few days later. Mrs. Oscar Dalrymple, who had been spending the afternoon with her mother and Mary Lynn, was preparing to return to the Grange. Alice had just come home again, a bright colour on her hectic cheeks, but weaker, as it seemed to them all. Alice was happier than she had been for years, in her sweet unselfishness. The trouble which had divided Colonel Hope and his nephew was at an end; Gerard had been reinstated in his uncle's favour, and was to marry Frances Chenevix. Lying on the sofa by the window, in the fading light, Alice had been giving them various particulars of this, and Selina, greatly interested, lingered longer than she had intended. But she had to go.

Jumping up hurriedly, she began to put on her bonnet and cloak. Mrs. Dalrymple rang the bell. It was to tell Reuben to be in readiness to attend her daughter.

"As if I wanted old Reuben with me, mamma!" exclaimed Selina. "Why, I shall run home in no time!"

"He had better be with you," sighed Mrs. Dalrymple: the sigh given to the disturbed state of things abroad. "The neighbourhood is not very quiet to-day, as you know, Selina, and it is getting dusk."

It was not quiet at all. The summary process, eviction, had been resorted to by Pinnett, as regarded the tenants of the Mill Cottages. He had forced them out with violence. One of them, named Thoms, had resisted to the last. Go out he would not, and the assailants could not get him out.

A meeting was to be held this same evening at Farmer Lee's. It could not be called a secret meeting; the farmer would have disdained the name; but those about to attend it waited until the dusk should shelter them, conscious that they were likely to speak treason against their landlord.

"Thoms is out," cried Farmer Bumford, as he entered Mr. Lee's house, in excitement.

"Out! How did they get him out?"

"Unroofed him, Lee. Pulled his place to pieces bit by bit, and so forced him out. He is now with the rest of the unfortunate lot."

"I thought such practices were confined to Ireland," said the honest farmer. "It's time something was done to protect us. Oscar Dalrymple will have his sins to answer for."

It was at this hour, when the twilight of the autumn evening was deepening, that Selina started for home. She chose the way by the common: a longer way, and in other respects not so desirable to-night. Selina's spirit was fearless enough, and she wanted to see whether the rumour could be true—that the unhappy people, just ejected, had collected there, meaning to encamp on it. Reuben, with the licence of an old and faithful servant, remonstrated, begging her to go home by the turnpike road: but Selina chose to cross the common.

Surely enough, the unfortunate lot, as Mr. Bumford called them, had gathered there on its outskirts, in view of their late homes, their poor goods and chattels, much damaged in the mêlée, piled in little heaps around them. Men, their hearts panting for revenge, sobbing and moaning women and shivering children, there they stood, or sat, or lay about. The farmers, Lee and Bumford, would later on open their barns to them for the night; but at present they expected to encamp here, under the stars.

In the midst of the harsh converse that prevailed, the oaths, and the abuse lavished on Oscar Dalrymple—for these poor, ignorant labourers refused, like their betters, to believe that Pinnett could so act without the landlord's orders—they espied, hurrying past them at a swift pace, their landlord's wife. Selina walked with her head down; now that she saw the threatening aspect of affairs, she wished she had listened to Reuben, and taken the open road. One of them came running up; a resolute fellow, named Dyke.

"You'd hurry by, would you?" said he, in a tone that spoke more of plaint than threat. "Won't you turn your eyes once, to the ruin your husband has wrought? Look at the mud and mortar! If the walls warn't of new brick or costly stone, they was good enough for us. They were our homes. Look at the spot now!"

Selina trembled visibly. She was aware of the awful feeling abroad against her husband, and a dread rushed into her heart that they might be going to visit it on her. Would they ill-use her?—kill her?

Reuben spoke up: but he was powerless against so many, and he knew it; therefore his tone was more conciliating than it would otherwise have been.

"What do you mean by molesting this lady? Stand away, Dyke, and let her pass. You wouldn't hurt her: if she is Mr. Dalrymple's wife she was the Squire's daughter, and *he* was always good to you."

"Stand away yourself, old man; who said we were going to hurt her?" roughly retorted Dyke. "'Taint likely; and you've said the reason why. Ma'am, do you see these ruins? Do they make you blush?"

"I am very sorry to see them, Dyke," answered Selina. "It is no fault of mine."

"Is it hard upon us, or not, that we should be turned out of the poor roofs that sheltered us? We paid our bit of rent, all on us; not one was a defaulter. How would you like to be turned out of your home, and told the poorhouse was afore you and an order for it, if you liked to go there?"

"I can only say how very sorry I am," she returned, distressed as well as terrified. "I wish I could help you and put you into better cottages to-morrow! But I am as powerless as you are."

"Will you tell *him* to do it—the master? We are coming up to ask him. Will you tell him to come out and face us, and look at them ruins, and look at *us*; at our wives and little ones shivering there in the cold?"

Selina seemed to be shivering as much as they were. "It is Pinnett who has done it," she said, "not Mr. Dalrymple. You should lay the blame on him."

"Pinnett!" roared Dyke, throwing his arm before the other men, now surrounding them, to stop their murmurings, for he thought his own speech the best. "Would Pinnett have dared to do this without the master's orders? Pinnett's a tool in his hands. Say to him, ma'am, please, that we are not going to stand Pinnett's doings and be quiet; we'll drown him first, let us once catch hold on him; and we be coming up to the Grange ourselves to say so to the master."

Finding she was to be no further detained, Selina sped on to the Grange. Oscar was in the oak parlour. She threw herself into a chair and burst into tears.

"Oscar, I have been so terrified. As I came by the common, with Reuben, the men were there, and ——"

"What men?" interrupted Mr. Dalrymple.

"Those who have been ejected from the cottages. They stopped me, and began to speak about their wrongs."

"Their—*wrongs*—did they say?"

"Yes, and I must say it also," she firmly answered, induced by fright and excitement to remonstrate against the injustice she had hitherto not liked to interfere with. "Cruel wrongs. Oscar, if you go on like this, oppressing all on the estate, you will be murdered as sure as you live. They are threatening to drown Pinnett if they can get hold of him; and they do not lay the blame on Pinnett, except as your agent, but on you."

"Pinnett is not my agent. What Pinnett does, he does on his own score. As to these harsh measures—as they are called—my sanction of them was not asked."

"But the poor men cannot see it in that light, Oscar, cannot be brought to believe it," she returned, the tears running down her cheeks. "It does seem so impossible to believe that Pinnett can be allowed to —"

"There, that's enough," interrupted Oscar. "Let it end."

"Yes, but the trouble won't end, Oscar. And the men say they are coming up here. There's a meeting, too, at Lee's to-night."

"They can come if they please, and hold as many meetings as they please," equably observed Oscar. "Men who are living in a state of semi-rebellion must learn a wholesome lesson."

"They have been provoked to it. They were never rebellious in papa's time."

He made no reply. Selina, her feelings strongly excited, her sympathies bubbling up, continued.

"It will be cruel to the farmers if you turn them from their farms; it is doubly cruel to have forced these poor men from their cottages. They paid their rent. You should see the miserable wives and children, huddling together on the common. I could not have acted so, Oscar, if I had not a shilling in the world."

Mr. Dalrymple wheeled round his chair to face his wife. "Whose cruel conduct has been the original cause of it?" he asked in his cold voice, that to her sounded worse than another man's anger. "Who got into secret debt, to the tune of some seven or eight thousand pounds—ay, nearer ten thousand, counting expenses—and let the bills come in to me?"

She dropped her eyes then, for his reproach was true.

"And forced me to retrench, almost to starvation, and to exact the last farthing that the estate will yield, to keep me from a prison? Was it you, or I, Mrs. Dalrymple?"

"But things need not be made quite so bad," she took courage to say in a timid tone; "you need not proceed to these great extremes."

"Your father's system was one of indulgence; mine is not, and the tenants, large and small, don't know what to make of it. As to Pinnett, he does not consider himself responsible to me for his actions; and I—I cannot interfere with them. So long as I am a poor man, struggling to pay your debts, Selina, so long must Pinnett take his own course."

Oscar turned back again, caught up the book he had laid down, and went on reading it. Selina took a seat on the other side the table, and sat supporting her head with her hands. She wished things were not so wretchedly uncomfortable, or that some fairy would endow her with a good fortune.

Suddenly a tramp of feet arose outside the house. Oscar heard it, unmoved; Selina did not hear it, or she might have flown sooner to bar and bolt the doors. Before she could effect this, the malcontents of the common were in the hall, their numbers considerably augmented. It looked a formidable invasion. Was it murder they intended, or arson?—what was it not? Selina, in her terror, flew to the top of the house, and a servant maid flew after her: they both, with one accord, seized upon a rope, and the great alarm-bell boomed out from the Grange.

Up came the people from far and near; up came the fire-engines, from the station close by, and felt exceedingly aggrieved at finding no fire: the farmers, disturbed in the midst of their pipes and ale, rushed up from Mr. Lee's. It was nothing but commotion. Old Mrs. Dalrymple, terrified nearly to death at the alarm-bell, hastened to the scene, Mary Lynn with her, and Reuben running behind them.

Contention, prolonged and bitter, was going on in the hall. Oscar Dalrymple at one end, listening, and not impatiently, to his unwelcome visitors, who would insist upon being heard at length. He answered them calmly and civilly, not exasperating them in any way, but he gave no hope of a change in the existing policy.

After seeing his mistress seated in the hall, for she insisted on making one of the audience, poor Reuben, grieved to the heart at the aspect of affairs altogether, went outside the house, and paced about in the moonlight. It was a fine night. He had strolled near the stables, when he was accosted by some one who stood aloof, under the shade of their side wall.

"What's the matter here, that people should be running, in this way, into the Grange?"

"I should call it something like a rise," answered Reuben, sorrowfully. "Are you a stranger, sir?"

"I am a stranger. Until this night I have not been in the neighbourhood for years. But I formerly was on intimate terms with the Dalrymple family, and have stayed here with them for weeks together."

"Have you now, though!" cried Reuben. "In the Squire's time, sir?"

"In the Squire's time. I remember you, I think. Reuben."

"Ay, I am Reuben, sir. Sad changes have taken place since then. My old master's gone, and Mr. Robert is gone, and the Grange is now Oscar Dalrymple's."

"I knew of Mr. Dalrymple's death. What became of his son?"

"He soon followed his father. It will not do to talk of, sir."

"Do you mean that he died?" returned the stranger. But before Reuben could answer, Mr. Lee came up, and commenced a warm comment on the night's work.

"I hope there'll be no bloodshed," said he, "we don't want that; but the men are growing more excited, and Mr. Dalrymple has sent off a private messenger to the police station."

"This gentleman used to know the family," interposed Reuben; "he has come to the place to-night for the first time for years. It's a fine welcome for him, this riot."

"I was asking some particulars of what has transpired since my absence," explained the stranger. "I have been out of England, and now thought to renew my acquaintance with the family. What did Robert Dalrymple die of? I knew him well."

"He fell into trouble, sir," answered Reuben. "A random, wicked London set got hold of him, fleeced and ruined him, and he could not bear up against it."

"Died of it?" questioned the stranger.

"He killed himself," said Mr. Lee, in a low tone. "Threw himself into the Thames from one of the London bridges, and was drowned."

"How deplorable! And so the Grange passed to Oscar Dalrymple?"

"Yes," said the farmer. "He married the elder of the young ladies, Selina. And something not pleasant arose with them. They went to London, and there she ran very deeply into debt. Her husband brought her back to the Grange; and since then he has been an awful landlord, grinding us all down to powder. Things have come to such a pass now that we expect a riot. The poor labourers who tenanted the Mill Cottages have been ejected to-day; they have come up to have it out with Oscar Dalrymple, leaving their families and chairs and tables on the common. One of them, Thoms, could not be forced out, so they just took his roof off and his doors out."

The stranger seemed painfully surprised. "I never thought to hear this of a Dalrymple!"

But here Reuben interposed. Jealous for the name, even though borne by Oscar, he told of the leasing of the estate to Pinnett, and that it was he, not Oscar, who was proceeding to these cruel extremities.

"I should call that so much nonsense," said the stranger. "Lease the estate! that has a curious sound. Has he leased away all power over it? One cannot believe that."

"No, and we don't believe it," said the farmer; "not one of us, Mr. Dalrymple can't make us, though he tries hard to do so. He is playing Old Nick over us, sir, and nothing else. It was a fatal night for us that took Mr. Robert."

"You would have been better off under him, you think?"

"Think!" indignantly retorted the farmer. "You could not have known Robert Dalrymple, to ask it."

"Robert Dalrymple died in debt, I take it. Did he owe much in this neighbourhood?"

"Nothing here."

"Did he owe you anything?"

"Me!" cried the farmer. "Not he. Why, only a day before his death I had sent five hundred pounds to him to invest for me. He had not time to do it himself, but a gentleman who took a great deal of interest in Mr. Robert, and saw to his affairs afterwards, did it."

"What gentleman was that?"

"It was Mr. Grubb: he is Sir Francis Netherleigh now, and has come into Court Netherleigh. His sister—who is at the Grange to-night with old Mrs. Dalrymple—and Mr. Robert were to have been married."

"Robert Dalrymple may not be dead," abruptly spoke the stranger.

But this hypothesis was received with disfavour; not to say scorn. The stranger maintained his opinion, saying that it *was* his opinion.

"Then perhaps you'll enjoy your opinion in private," rebuked Mr. Lee. "To talk in that senseless manner only makes us feel the fact of his death more sharply."

"What if I tell you I met him abroad, only a year ago?"

There was a dead pause. Reuben breathed heavily. "Oh, don't play with us!" he cried out; "if my dear young master's alive, let me know it. But he cannot be alive," he added mournfully: "he would have made it known to us before now."

The stranger unwound a shawl-handkerchief, in which his voice and chin had been muffled, raised his soft round hat from his brows, and advanced from the shade cast by the stable wall, into the moonlight.

"Reuben! John Lee! do I look anything like him?"

Reuben sank on his knees, too faint to support himself in the overwhelming surprise and joy. For it was indeed his young master, Robert Dalrymple, raised, as it seemed, from a many years' grave. The old servant sobbed like a child.

"It is nothing less than magic," cried the farmer, when he had wrung Robert's hand as if he would wring it off, and both he and Reuben had had time to take in the full truth of the revelation. "Dead—yet living!"

"I never was dead," said Robert. "The night that I found myself irretrievably ruined——"

But here Robert Dalrymple's explanation was interrupted by a noise. The malcontents, driven wild by Oscar's cold equanimity, which they took to be purely supercilious, were rushing out of the Grange by the front entrance, fierce threats and oaths pouring from their lips.

Oscar Dalrymple might go to perdition. They'd fire the place over his head, commencing with the barns and out-houses.

"Stay, stay, stay! let me have a few words with you before you begin," spoke one, meeting them with assured but kind authority—and his calm voice acted like oil poured upon troubled waters.

It was Sir Francis Netherleigh. Hearing of the riot, he had hastened up. He reasoned with the men, promised to see what *he* could do to get their wrongs redressed, and told them that certain barns and out-houses of his were being warmed and made comfortable for them for the night, and their wives and children were already on their way to take possession. Finally, he subdued them to peace and good temper.

But while this was taking place in front of the house there had been another bit of by-play near the stables. Mary Lynn, terrified for the effect of the riotous threats on Mrs. Dalrymple in her precarious state of health, begged her to return home, and ran out to look for Reuben. Mr. Lee discerned her leaning over the gate of the kitchen-garden, gazing about on all sides in the moonlight. A bright idea struck him, quite a little bit of romance.

"I'll fetch her to you here, Mr. Robert," he said. "I'll break the glad news to her carefully. And—you won't turn us out of our homes, will you, sir?" he lingered to say.

"That I certainly will not; and those who are already out shall go back again. But," added Robert, smiling, "I fear I shall be obliged to turn somebody out of the Grange."

"There's Pinnett, sir," came the next doubting remark. "If Mr. Oscar Dalrymple has leased him the estate, who knows but the law may give him full power over us——"

"Leased him the estate!" interposed Robert. "Why, my good friend, it was not Oscar Dalrymple's to lease: it was mine. Be at rest."

Relieved at heart, the farmer marched up to Mary; managing, despite the most ingenious intentions, to startle and confuse her. He opened the conference by telling her, with an uncomfortably mysterious air, that a dead man had come to life again who was waiting to see her: and Mary's thoughts, greatly disturbed, flew to a poor labourer who had died, really died, that morning.

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Lee?" she interrupted with some awe. "You *can't* know what you are saying. Colter come to life again!"

"There! I know how I always bungle over this sort o' thing," cried the abashed farmer. "You must just forgive me. And you can well afford to, Miss Mary, for it's not Colter come to life at all; it is young Mr. Robert Dalrymple.—And here he is, walking towards you."

The farmer discreetly disappeared. Mary staggered into the shade

and stood for support against the trunk of the great elm tree. Robert drew her from it to the shelter of his faithful heart.

"Yes, it is I, my darling; I, myself—do not tremble so," he whispered. "God has been very merciful to me, more merciful than I deserved, and has brought me back to you and to home again."

She lay there, on his breast, the strong arms around her that would henceforth be her shelter through life.

(To be concluded.)



A TABLEAU.

THRONED; crimson robes around her; a crown of regal splendour
On her lofty head; all furniture of pomp and state complete;
One jewelled hand stretched forward to touch the bended shoulder
Of the courtly squire low kneeling in reverence at her feet.

To touch with gleaming sword-blade the velvet of his doublet,
Ere she utter the command that raises him her knight:
So the drawn-back curtain shows her, a haughty queen of beauty,
And dazzled eyes look on and smile approval of the sight.

"Were the picture real!" she whispers down in her heart's close chamber.

"Were the picture real!" he echoes, in his wounded love's despair.

"Were I a queen indeed," she sighs, "and he my humble servant,
What joy to stoop and lift him up my sovereignty to share!"

"Were I her favoured page in truth, to whom she granted knighthood
Were she above and I below, I might not woo in vain.

Ah! prouder than the proudest queen, she will not wear a favour;
Meets all pleading from a higher stand with passionless disdain."

The curtain now is drawn again across the gorgeous tableau;
The queen unclasps her jewels, and lays crown and robes aside;
The knight throws off his cloak; and, while applause rings to the ceiling,
The mirage fades for ever in the desert land of pride.

EMMA RHODES.

MRS. SIDDONS.

EVEN at this day it is almost impossible to pronounce the name of Mrs. Siddons without a certain thrill, which runs through us from heart to brain, as indistinct shapes of horror, and wonder, and mystery rise up around us. We tremble as the shadowy crowd of pale phantoms grows thicker and thicker, and wonder what manner of woman she could have been who, after the lapse of more than half a century, still, in the mere kingdom of fancy and memory, possesses such a spell over us. And yet this mighty enchantress has the simplest and most womanly of stories, for her transcendent genius went hand-in-hand with the most simple and womanly of natures. These facts will stand out very clearly before us as we follow the course of her long life.

In 1755 a country manager, named Roger Kemble, was making for himself a small, laboriously earned, local celebrity, and a laboriously earned competency, by the conscientious way in which he carried out his theatrical engagements, and by the respectable regularity of the life led by himself and his family—a thing not too common among people of their position and profession in those days. The worthy man had good reasons for perseverance and industry in his calling—reasons which were very fully impressed upon him by the cry of a new baby sounding yearly in his nursery. But he bravely struggled on through home worries and professional annoyances—struggled on, most faithfully and firmly helped in everything by his true-hearted, strong-spirited wife; and found an average share of light and shadow in his career. It was in 1755, when the steady activity of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kemble was at its full height, that their daughter, Sarah Kemble, the tragic muse that was to be, was born.

The details of home life and the details of theatrical life jostled each other round little Sarah Kemble's cradle, so that it grew natural to her, before she could reason upon the subject, to think of the two as making up one harmonious whole. Thus it was easier for her in after days, than it, perhaps, would be to many women, to be a model wife and mother while she was a queen in dramatic art. The little girl had a mind that was, by nature, an early opening blossom; and the sort of talk which daily went on around her, and the sort of training that she received, helped the fair flower yet quicker to unfold.

Theatrical talent seemed to come to her naturally, and as a matter of course. She began to act almost before she began to speak and to walk. Her parents were well pleased with the small, bright wonder, as it developed before their eyes, and gave her intellect every facility

for following its native bent. But they watched lovingly over her character, and preserved it, as far as was possible in those days for people in their position, from becoming frayed and soiled with too early contact with the hard realities of the world. They were fully resolved that she should be an actress. And, in truth, she seemed created for the profession, and so they let her, while still scarcely out of the nursery, take many small, childish parts on the stage of her father's theatre.

Sarah seems to have taken the matter in an extremely simple, commonplace way. Her father acted; her mother, though she may have seldom appeared on the stage, was always talking about acting. The ladies and gentlemen who went in and out of her home, and chatted to her, and played with her, acted. Her little brother, John, was already beginning to act in his frocks and pinafores. In truth, it seemed to Sarah a more ordinary thing to act and be gazed at by an admiring public, than it does to most children to beg for sweets and toys. She did not see that her attainments were anything to be so very proud of—they were so common and general among her surroundings. And so, born, as she was, to the trade, she passed through the trying ordeal almost unscathed.

Sarah Kemble's first marked success was when, at the age of thirteen, she played Ariel. She darted hither and thither about the stage with such airy grace—there was something so sprite-like in her free, wavy swiftness of motion, she seemed so entirely to be a creature born of the loves of a breeze and a sunbeam, that the whole audience broke into frantic applause at the end of the play, and her proud, happy father began dimly to foresee his daughter's future. After that, as she glided from childhood into early womanhood, she continued to take more or less difficult parts in Roger Kemble's theatre; so that the light and melody of the poets' highest and sweetest conceptions grew, as it were, into her young being, until they became like part of herself. Yet, all this while, she was by no means kept by her parents shut out from the most commonplace, every-day, trivial matters. She was taught to help her mother in the household work, and would go gaily from a rehearsal to the making of a pudding, or the darning of a pair of stockings. No doubt it was this free, constant mixing in the simple family life of her home that gave so healthy a balance to her mind, and kept wild discords out of her character.

Thus time went on till Sarah Kemble had reached the age of 18. Her figure had developed into Juno-like majesty, her handsome face had power printed in its every feature, from the wonderful, lustrous eyes, down to the subtle changes of expression about the finely chiselled lips; her depth and breadth of talent in her art was daily showing itself more and more remarkable. No wonder, then, that her parents had very brilliant dreams about the future of their gifted daughter. If she went to London and made a successful *début* there,

who could tell that a peer of the realm might not be sufficiently smitten with her charms to lay a coronet at her feet?

Such being the cherished visions of the worthy Kemble couple concerning their beautiful, talented girl, it was, certainly, a somewhat severe trial for them to find out that Sarah had already given away her heart. The favoured cavalier was, if truth must be told, no cavalier at all, except when, sometimes, he appeared on the stage in helm and plume not always of the newest. He was a young actor called Siddons, with a good-looking face, and a frank, kindly temper, and a warm heart, but endowed with no striking professional ability or intellectual force. Sarah's imagination, however, chose to make him co her hero, and not all the opposition of her parents to such a connection for her could make her give up her lover. For some time Mr. and Mrs. Kemble persisted in their vain efforts to

"Bind a flame with flaxen band,"

but the young actress was no coquette; nothing, all her life through, was farther than that from her nature; her plighted troth was not a thing to be thrown on and off like a stage head-dress. One fine morning, therefore, the father and mother were made very plainly aware of the folly of their endeavours by the news that Sarah had taken matters into her own hands, and was already Mrs. Siddons.

Sarah Siddons found that she had made no mistake in the step she had taken. The man whom she had chosen was a man to whom a woman might safely entrust her happiness, and throughout the whole of her long married life the fire on the household altar of the pair continued to burn with a calm, steady light. Mr. Siddons, it is true, never attained to making any name for himself individually; throughout his story he was only known as the husband of Mrs. Siddons; but he was a man of honour and of heart, and with this his wife was fully content. She was as true to him as steel. Though her admirers and would-be lovers were legion, not a single man of that day, when the full noontide of her fame was blazing down upon her, could boast the faintest shadow of a liaison with the tragic muse.

The home of the young actress was a home full of quiet sunshine; her first baby was smiling on her knee, her parents had whispered a word of forgiveness. So young a grandmother was Mrs. Roger Kemble, that when she took her first grandchild in her arms she had a little son of her own trotting at her side, the Charles Kemble of after days. No wonder that she soon melted into a soft dew of tears at Sarah's prayer for pardon. Yes, it was a home of quiet sunshine, but naturally enough it was a home where money was not too abundant. Young Mrs. Siddons, the girl wife and mother, began to see that earnest work at her profession would be needful to keep the little domestic bark afloat, and the knowledge of this, no doubt, first fully aroused her genius, and that quality which, all her life, went hand-in-hand with it—her unwearying, exhaustless diligence in her art.

She got an engagement in the theatre at Cheltenham, and there

her name as an actress gained its first wide celebrity. In those days Cheltenham was the most favourite resort in England for languid fashion that did not know what to do with itself, and so made an employment out of supposed illness. A new star in the theatrical world was a real treasure to the tongue of the behooped belles and befrilled dandies, who really could not find scandal enough to occupy their talk from sunrise to sunset. No doubt Mrs. Siddons, the hard-working actress, who had, in reality, so little in her that was akin to her Cheltenham audience, became more quickly famous in a place like this than she would have done anywhere else.

Tidings of the young actress's success spread, in time, from Cheltenham to London. Garrick, who was then manager of Drury Lane, heard of her, and wrote to engage her for the next London season. We can fancy how her heart beat and her cheek flushed with pride, when that letter came from the acknowledged high-priest of dramatic art of the eighteenth century. She was, of course, ready at once to obey the great man's summons. She was full of hopes and fears, as was but natural for a young artist in her position, and yet her consciousness of genius upheld her, as on a strong pinion. Her first appearance before a London audience was at Drury Lane, as "Isabella," in Southerne's play of "The Fatal Marriage," and throughout that season she continued to act in different parts at that same theatre.

Though she was allowed on all sides to be a young actress of great promise, she does not seem, at this period, to have become an especial favourite with the London public. Her genius had probably, as yet, not reached quite its full stature; she had still something to learn in her art. Besides, in those days, London playgoers were very fastidious, and were more ready to cling to old pets, than to receive new ones; it was, in general, a slow process finding the way into their good graces. As for Garrick, who might have given the young actress such a strong, helping hand, a touch of jealousy seems to have made him cold towards her; his only recorded remark concerning her is, that she waved about her arms so much on the stage that he always feared she would knock off his wig. The prescient soul of the great actor may have dimly foreseen that this young woman was soon to ascend the throne which he was just about to abdicate; the throne on which he had sat so gloriously; and he may have shrunk a little, as many of us in his place would doubtless have shrunk, at the presage of the cry which would shortly be ringing through the theatrical and intellectual world, "*Le roi est mort, vive la reine!*"

Mrs. Siddons was somewhat disappointed with the result of her first London season. The feeling was natural; but though she was disappointed, she was not cast down. She never for a moment relaxed in her brave efforts in her art; she knew that her genius was there; and she went on in calm, patient hope, fully determined that, though a London audience did not just at present seem to value

her very much, they should one day prize her as a most precious jewel in the national crown. She left London, and found, easily, various engagements at York and other towns in the provinces, her reputation increasing rapidly, her grasp of art growing more and more firm. Hers was no feeble spark of talent that could be extinguished by a partial want of success.

Sheridan had now taken Garrick's place as manager of Drury Lane. Reports that flew up from the country on busy wings and hovered about the theatre, told how Mrs. Siddons was winning for herself a fresh blossom in her wreath of fame wherever she went. The new manager thought that he could not do better than recall her to fill her old situation ; he had formerly seen her act, and had conceived a very high idea of her powers. She came back willingly, yet a little proudly too ; she was longing to charm and subjugate the highest audience in the land, but she did not choose to let them know it too plainly. From that time forward her popularity in London grew brighter and brighter, and more and more extensive, until her genius received its full tribute of homage, and she was acknowledged at once by the aristocracy, of rank, of wealth, and of intellect, to be the greatest tragic actress that had ever trod an English stage, that ever interpreted the heart and mind of Shakespeare.

Mrs. Siddons' highest triumph was her *Lady Macbeth*. Her conception of the character was at once so passionate and so delicate, so instinct with the transfiguring fire of genius, yet so full of the most vivid reality, that her audience, as it looked and listened, were completely carried away from the theatre in the middle of London in the eighteenth century, to tremble and weep in the old Scottish palace of the north. It seemed no mimic scene of horror and of woe ; it was surely a terrible bit of real, human life. She herself entirely lost her own identity in the character for the time, as indeed she did in all the various people that she represented on the stage. The following incident, belonging to this period of her story, shows how completely she threw herself into the creations of the poet's fancy, to which her splendid genius gave living, breathing shape.

Late one night Mr. Siddons was sitting by the fire in the modest family parlour, which, in that most unassuming household, served as dining-room or drawing-room, as the case might be. He was smoking calmly his last pipe, and beginning to think about going to bed, whither, as this was not one of her evenings at the theatre, he believed his wife had gone already. The house was sunk in dreamy silence, so was the quiet street outside ; silence only broken, now and then, by the roll of distant wheels. The actor had been drawing a vague picture of a little holiday trip which he and Sarah would take next summer, and had fallen into a half doze, in which he was driving down a country lane all scented with honeysuckle, all draped with eglantine. Suddenly he was roused, with a start, by hurried footsteps, that were flying rather than running down the passage.

Who could it be? he asked himself, all in a maze and a wonder, as he jumped up and rubbed his sleep-laden eyes. He had hardly had time to let the question go darting through his brain, when the door of the room was flung open quickly, as by a hasty, trembling hand, and a female figure rushed in.

Mr. Siddons gazed in speechless astonishment, not unmixed with a touch of fear. There before him stood his wife, her fine hair dishevelled, her dress all in disorder, her face all quivering with strong emotion. In bewildered alarm he asked her what was the matter, but her only answer was to throw herself into his arms, and burst into a torrent of tears. He soothed her tenderly, not knowing what to think, and gradually she grew calmer. Then her words made the mystery plain enough. Instead of going to bed, as he had bade her do, she had been sitting up studying her part as Lady Macbeth; and the character had so completely absorbed her in itself, she had so entirely realized the horror of each situation in the play, had seen it all so distinctly before her eyes, as if she had been there in the body, that a wild, unreasoning terror had seized her, and she had rushed away to seek human companionship.

What shapes of fame and glory go in and out in the living picture of Mrs. Siddons' life at this period—the period when she stood at the very top of the ladder of celebrity and popularity as an actress—when her genius was fully acknowledged on every side, and all the intellect, all the greatness of the land gathered round her to do her honour. One evening we see her reading Milton aloud to an assembly where talent and beauty are as plentiful on every side as flowers in the hedgerows in May; and, as she ceases, what a wondrous face that is which is bending over her—a face so full of fiery power, yet a face which can be like a rippling brook in the sunshine in its soft mobility of expression when this man speaks sweet words to a woman, or plays with a child. We do not marvel that his face can sway a great nation's senate as easily as the wind does the trees of a mighty forest. As we hear its rich, melodious tones repeat, in the great actress's ear, as she closes her book, the lines beginning with the words, "The angel ceased," no wonder that even she, used as she is to incense, blushes a little with pleasure at such a compliment from the lips of Edmund Burke.

Next we find the daughter of the country manager entering no less a place than the palace of royalty itself. A prim little figure, with an air of grave importance, which sits almost comically upon it, yet with a whole world of meaning in the plain, interesting face, is receiving her with a dainty, yet elaborate curtsy. Of course Fanny Burney, the quondam authoress, the now maid of honour, is the only person in the not very literary household of their Majesties, King George and Queen Charlotte, competent to be the companion of Mrs. Siddons.

What a tinkle of laughter, what a dancing and tripping of merry

words off a most nimble tongue ; what a flashing, and twinkling, and gleaming of wit there is to-day at the table in the actress's modest dwelling ! We should have thought such a brilliant guest would have sought far more richly furnished boards to shine at. We should have thought that the tragic muse could hardly brook such gay, airy talk ; but Sheridan can glitter when and where he pleases, and Mrs. Siddons can be as full of mirth as a very school-girl when he, her old friend, is at her side.

Yet though her life was thus girdled about with observance and worship from the highest in the land, though her mind and imagination were always employed in realizing the most glorious creations of the most glorious poets, Mrs. Siddons, in her home, was at once the simplest and the tenderest of women. She did a great deal of the household work herself ; and her grand friends, when they called, would be met by her with a flat-iron in her hand, or would find her seated, studying a new part, while, at the same time, she rocked the cradle of her latest born, and knitted her husband's stockings. When she went to the theatre she was generally accompanied by one or more of her children, and the little things would cling about her, holding her hand or her dress, as she stood in the side scenes. The fine ladies, who petted her, could not put one grain of their fine-ladyism into her. To the end of her life she remained a triumphant proof of the not too generally believed fact that an artist woman can be, at the same time, a most purely domestic woman.

Mrs. Siddons was a woman of high principle, and deep religious feeling and practice. The breath of scandal never even dared to touch her name. She was true to every duty. Her chief fault was a certain too warm love of money ; but the straitened circumstances in which her married life began, may, perhaps, form some excuse for such a failing.

Mrs. Siddons' last appearance on the stage was at the age of sixty-one, at her brother Charles's benefit. After that she withdrew entirely into private life. Her old age was full of calm and honour, though, perhaps, she may have missed a little the excitement of her earlier life ; but there have been few more radiant sunsets than hers when, at length, she sank into eternal rest.

ALICE KING.



THE WHITE WOMAN OF SLAITH

BY MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS.

I.

SUPERSTITION dies hard, and who shall say that when Superstition dies, his twin sister, Veneration, will not droop and languish over his bier? But nowhere does superstition linger longer than among the fisher-folk of the far north. The men who "go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters," not only "see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep," but they leave behind them ashore women sensitive as barometers to every change of wind or weather, keenly susceptible of all that may affect the husbands and fathers and brothers who risk their lives that they and others may live. And they also leave behind them children to be influenced by all they hear and see, and to catch up and transmit every eerie whisper that may fall from their elders.

So from generation to generation the wind has had voices for the fisher-folk the trading townsman could not hear, and the wreathing mist has held shapes the city matron could not see: voices and shapes of awe and mystery, powerful to bless or ban.

Such may have been the "White Woman of the Wreck," of whom the hardy fisher-wives of Slaith to this day speak in undertones, lest the very utterance of her name should bring the ill-omened spirit amongst them.

Yet only once has she been seen within living memory, and a gray-haired woman keeps the record in her heart.

Far back, when this time and grief bowed Hilda Sanderson's grandfather was a boy, when the fishermen's huts were not perched here and there upon the rocks to be out of reach of the tide, but looked out from beneath the cliffs on a fair expanse of sand and shingle and a land-locked bay, was the White Woman seen for the first time, and *in the flesh*.

Rude and uncultivated as are the fisher-folk of Slaith in these our times, civilisation is yet making its mark on the young; but in those bygone days the dwellers on too many of our coasts looked upon all spoils of the ocean as their legitimate right. So at Slaith when a fierce north-easter ravaged the coast and kept yawls and cobbles at home, the storm would bring as sure a harvest as was won from the deep on those moonlight nights when the herring-boats were out. And notwithstanding the abundance of coal in the wild region around, frequent wrecks made wood the common fuel: it was plentiful, and cost nothing but the gathering and stowing away.

Never had come storm to Slaith at once so productive, or so dis-

astrous, as that which spread its lurid banners over the sky one September evening more than a century ago, warning the busy fishermen to put back and haul their craft high and dry upon the beach for safety. Only one boat, which had set sail in advance of its fellows, disregarded the storm-signals of the sky and pursued its course, whether in recklessness or confidence is not known.

The purple clouds gathered over the crimson glare, the wind came howling up, driving blacker masses of cumuli before it, and night set prematurely in over land and sea.

The village, sheltered on the north and west by a steep, stern ironstone cliff which spread its protecting arm far out to sea in a formidable reef or "neb," was all astir. Men and women gathered on the beach intent on hauling up the boats, securing nets and tackle, and speculating what luck the sea had in store for them, as it broke in foam and froth on the hard rocks and ran in almost to their feet.

Yet, mingling with the crowd and these speculations, came one short-skirted fishwife to the beach with wildly anxious eyes, and hands pressed on her throbbing breast, for Robert Blackburn's boat had not come back with the rest, and it held her husband and her boys. Only the youngest clung to her woollen skirt, and added, with his questions, to her fears and agony.

As the waves leapt up to meet the vivid lightning darting from the clouds and dancing on their crests, she could discern through the blinding rain a disabled ship struggling amid the billows, and she felt how little hope there was for her husband's coble in a gale before which so large a vessel was driving to destruction.

Yes, driving helplessly on towards the Neb and never a boat or a hand put forth to the rescue, though the minute gun boomed in solemn appeal above the roar of the elements; though shrieks and cries for help were borne in by the wind as the doomed vessel was hurried nearer and nearer to its fate; and though the lightning flashes revealed the white figure of a woman lashed to the broken mainmast, and hapless sailors clinging to the bowsprit and rigging.

Nearer ran the ship to the outlying reef, and nearer to a crowd of stalwart men who knew the coast, were inured to danger, and lacked neither strength nor courage to risk life or limb in saving life—but only *the will*. True, the danger was imminent, the risk great, the men had families dependent on their lives, and—if none were left to tell the story of the wreck, better luck would be for the village. So cries and shrieks fell on deaf ears. Not even the piteous adjuration "For God's sake!" which came with strange distinctness across the waters as the vessel struck, had power to move a man. Maggy Blackburn ran from one to another beseeching pity for the lady and the helpless crew, as they might hope for aid in like straits, as *her* husband and sons might be needing aid even then!

Sullen silence, or gruff admonitions to mind her own business were

the only response. Even the women turned away, the greed of gain, the hope of spoil, stronger than womanhood.

Morning dawned on a cold, gray sky, a receding tide, a placid sea, a fishing village nestling under rugged cliffs, with a long reach of smooth sand between the cottages and the narrow strip of boulders and shingle, and the outstretched arm of the Neb, looking innocent as any other benevolent protector.

It dawned also on smoke uprising from cottage fires kept alive during all the storm and tumult; on a sea and beach strewn with wreckage; on men and women wading into the surf to bring ashore boxes and bales within reach of arms or boat-hooks; on boats, well manned, steering among the rocks and shallows, or even into deeper currents around the Neb, to pick up jetsam and flotsam before the coastguard or the lord of the manor should come on the scene with a legal claim.

It dawned on the half-naked bodies of drowned sailors swaying hither and thither with the undulating waves, or lying disfigured among the rocks, among weeds and tangle, and inquisitive lobsters black as undertakers. It dawned, too, on a tall, slim woman in a white clinging garment, her head and shoulders wrapped in a black shawl, from beneath which her fair hair had fluttered and lay in wet, loosened tresses on the sand, where the tide had landed her and the broken mast together. Landed only to lie there unnoted and unregarded, although when the sun kissed the pale lips and eyes they opened to the light and warmth, and perchance a hope of deliverance thrilled through the half-insensate form.

It came not until too late. Maggy Blackburn and her boy retreating to their hut when the ship struck, had spent the intervening hours in weeping for the dear ones they never expected to behold again: and not until the sun was fairly up, and the boy had cried himself to sleep, did she venture forth to see the devastation night and storm and pitiless men had to answer for.

Far along the beach, away from the busy knots of wreckers, she found the White Woman lying to all appearance dead. A compassionate tear fell on the pale upturned face, and a word or two of pity dropped from the rough fishwife's lips—in her own grief sympathetic.

As she spoke, a pair of lovely blue eyes slowly unclosed and rested for an instant on her own in mute thanksgiving.

With a cry of surprise, Maggy strove to loosen the bonds which held the frail form to the mast. In vain! loving hands had tied them too securely, and the wetted cordage would not yield.

She had no knife. Rising to her feet she put her hands to her mouth and sent a loud halloo across the sands for help. Again and again she called. Her call was disregarded. A large cask was being rolled over the grating shingles.

At length an answer, prefaced by an oath, was shouted back.

"Mind thy own business, Maggy Blackburn, an' let th' woman be."

But Maggy, tender in the hour of her own dreaded bereavement, stooped to whisper, in ears which might or might not be conscious, the nature of her errand: and ignoring the belief that ill-luck follows the restoration of the shipwrecked to life, she sped along the sweep of sand to her own home for a knife, lest a churlish refusal might meet her on the beach, where knives were in active use.

Blackburn's cottage was mounted on a ledge of rock above the rest of the village, and was less accessible, and, though Maggy was strong and swift of foot, swifter-footed Death outran her. *He* had severed invisible cords, released the struggling spirit. It only remained for Maggy to release a stiffening corpse, bear it reverently beyond reach of the tide, and compose the dead limbs for burial, wofully wondering the while who would perform the like office for her Robert and his boys.

Intent on her melancholy occupation, absorbed in her own anguish, she heeded not the noisy group near the Neb quarrelling over their spoil, until a loud "Halloo" arrested her attention. Turning round, she saw a young fisherman's hand pointing seawards, and some instinct prompted her to fall on her knees with uplifted voice and hands. She felt rather than knew the distant sail for their own.

Robert Blackburn and his sons were safe, though their boat had sustained some damage. They had found a haven close at hand on the first outbreak of the tempest.

But what of the good ship that had gone to pieces on the Neb?

What the billows had spared the wreckers had industriously stowed away in secret caves and cellarage, till scarcely a spar remained afloat to tell the mournful story. And after the White Woman and the sailors washed ashore were buried in the sands there was rejoicing and carousal. "That was a lucky day for Slaith," they said, as they sat round fires supplied from the timber of the wreck; "drowned folk were not likely to dispute possession of their harvest, and no man living had put in a claim."

And as the "last lucky day" it was remembered and spoken of with regret as the winter nights drew in; and of all the good ships lost on our northern coasts not one went ashore at Slaith that had not sailed from it. No more luck of the kind came in their way. Even the take of fish grew scanty and precarious; and a rumour got about that a tall woman in a long white clinging robe, whose head was muffled in a black shawl, was sure to stand like a beacon on the uttermost point of the Neb whenever a storm was brewing, and with the motion of her white arms in the air warn approaching vessels of their danger; and that she had been seen to finger the nets as they hung outside the huts to dry, when they would break like tow and let the fish escape.

Certainly the nets were always under repair, and the boats; and

when the weird white figure was seen on the Neb, like a wreath of mist or spray, there would be apprehensive whispers in the village of the White Woman of the Wreck, and a sense of ill-luck spread its gloom and discontent over Slaith.

It made itself felt in envious antagonism to the Blackburns, who somehow seemed to prosper where others failed, and to be thriving better without a share of the great wreck's cargo than any of those whose cellars had been filled with her merchandise and stores. Silks had mildewed, casks had leaked, and fruits had been damaged by the sea-water.

"Nothing, however, seemed to go wrong with the Blackburns," was said with a grumble, not only at the firesides, but openly to Maggy and Robert both; and they were so often twitted with being "above their neighbours" in more than their dwelling, that as the ill-feeling spread, whilst the seasons went their round, the elder and younger Blackburns alike ceased to grumble at the extra distance and rugged path to their abode, since it kept them apart from ill neighbours.

A year had almost gone by since the day of the great wreck, when Robert Blackburn lamed his foot stumbling over a coil of cable on the beach, at the same time that his two upgrown sons lay tossing on their pillows in the burning arms of fever.

A sad and anxious week, this, for Maggy, watching her sick, with only Cuthbert, a lad of thirteen, to run to and from the distant apothecary, hew her wood, or draw her water.

His brothers had been three days in bed when he was sent in the early morning for water from the beck-spring. The village lay asleep at the foot of the rock; the boats, which had not been out overnight, were hauled up high on the beach—that beach which seemed to have narrowed so considerably; and a thick haze rested on the slightly heaving sea.

Something of this crossed the boy's mind as he came down the hill with his pail, and noted the high water-mark left by the receding tide.

Suddenly he beheld—as if she came out of the very mist—the White Woman of the Wreck glide over the sands and shingle, and touch the stern of every boat as she passed, with one omission—that of his father; and then, with a sweep of her long arm towards the line of cottages, glide away silently as she came, leaving Cuthbert so dazed he could scarcely find words to tell his mother what he had seen.

"Not a word to them inside!" she said, as she met him on the threshold. She too had seen the White Woman from her own door, and her heart sank lest Betty Rae's ill-savoured words should be true and their own luck indeed be on the turn. What if the omen should be to them, and her sons be taken from her?

Private forebodings did not, however, stifle her goodwill to others.

Cuthbert was despatched to the awakening village with the intelligence, and a word of advice for the men not to go to sea that day. Her messenger was greeted with incredulity and scorn. The Blackburns were not in favour, Maggy's motives were suspected, her story disbelieved.

"Are our wives to have empty creels because Maggy Blackburn's men-folk are laid by and canna work?" asked Peter Rae, the man who twelvemonths before had bade Maggy "Let the woman be!"

Cuthbert went back with a laugh ringing in his ears, and a hint that his mother had picked a convenient time for ghost-seeing.

Nevertheless, her message had not been wholly thrown away, however much her motive might be suspected. There was an absence of ordinary alacrity in preparing the boats for sea, and a disposition to talk rather than work. One old fisherman, with a weather-beaten face, whose name was Sanderson, declared that neither he nor his sons would put out to sea that day. "Better lose a take of fish than a' our lives, an' there's no kenning what mischief's afloat if th' White Woman *has* been seen."

There was a sneer at the Sandersons. Nevertheless, one or two young fellows held back at the last, and a yawl or two sailed without the full complement of hands—the Raes' for one.

It was a memorable day for Slaith.

When the sun reached its meridian, sea and sky were all aglow like molten gold, and the women on the shore, led by Betty Rae, laughed the stay-at-homes to scorn as they themselves went about their household ways panting with the unprecedented heat.

Maggy was thankful when a breeze came landward with the returning tide and through the open door to fan the flushed cheeks of fever; and not she only. But with the breeze came a little cloud out of the distant wave, and deepened and darkened and spread as the breeze swelled and mounted to a gale, and the long rollers of the advancing tide swept in on the shore, mounting higher and higher, and breaking on the Neb as though trying their strength on the rock and disputing its right to bar their progress.

The Sandersons said they saw the White Woman on the shore waving her long arms and beckoning to the waves. Calling all hands to help, they drew their own coble and the Blackburns' higher and higher up the beach, now alive with frightened fishwives wading in the surf to secure cables and tackle, nets and creels, hitherto supposed to lie beyond the highest tide.

But on came the rushing water, on and on as the daylight went, on and on in the darkness of night, white-lipped and roaring. Then there was a sudden stir within the cottages, as the water crawled in at the open doors and put out fires on the hearth.

A sudden stir, with glancing lanterns and flaring torches, to bear the infant and its cradle, the grandmother in her chair, and household goods anyhow up the rocky pathways to security; a stir all too

late and too hurried in the darkness to save all of life or property. The whole shore was invaded by the sea.

Morning broke on desolation. Weeping women and children up on the cliffs looked in vain for their homes down below. The village had been swept from the sands.

The two cobbles had held to their moorings and were but little damaged; of the picturesquely grouped cottages only ruins mingled with weeds and tangle were visible. No four walls were standing that were not, like the Blackburns', perched on the cliff.

There ran at last a shuddering reminder through the shelterless crowd that it was the anniversary of the "great wreck," as Betty Rae was missed from their midst, and a bundle of blue and red that had once been a woman was found amidst the débris of the Raes' dwelling. And as hour after hour, and day after day went by, and never yawl or coble came back to tell the secrets of the night or of the devastating storm, the homeless women, whose orphaned children clung wailing to their skirts, in their own agony envied the lot of Maggy Blackburn, whose men-folk were spared to her. And not a few remembered that, of all the village, she alone had shown compassion towards the White Woman of the Wreck.

Slaith—the original Slaith—was gone; homes and people: and the White Woman was seen no more by *that* generation.

II.

A NEW Slaith arose. Not immediately, and not on the sands. In spring and autumn the sea had possession of the old site at flood-tide. Of the bereaved families who had found refuge in holes and caves among the rocks, some wandered inland; others, who had means or a man left, began to build cabins here and there on the irregular hill-side. Buxom or energetic widows attracted husbands from other stations on the coast. There were marriages and intermarriages, notably between the Blackburns and the Sandersons. Even Rae's only surviving son (the one who had stayed ashore), having wherewith to purchase a new boat—secret spoil of the great wreck—had not far to seek a wife, who scouted the suggestion of ill-luck.

The new village rose under other auspices. The patriarchs of Slaith would have no wreckers in their midst, the awful visitation of the White Woman of the Wreck serving as a deterrent so long as an eye-witness remained to verify the story he handed down to future generations.

So long as Cuthbert Blackburn, the last survivor of the great storm, sat in the chimney nook, and related to his listening grandchildren how, with his own young eyes, he had seen the white woman with the black shawl cut away from the broken mast to be buried; and how, a year after, to a day, he had beheld the shadowy form of the dead and buried woman glide over the sands, shake a threatening

hand at the village, and touch the stern of every foredoomed boat ; the listening children would edge closer to each other, look fearfully around, and hold their breaths with awe.

And so long as the old man could totter about, with the wind playing amongst his grey locks, never a Blackburn or a Sanderson was known to bring other than a legitimate cargo ashore, although smuggling was openly connived at by people of note and respectability on the coast and inland.

But when the old grandfather was laid to rest, the White Woman might have been laid to rest also. She had lapsed into the airy region of tradition, and, in the daily duties and anxieties of fishermen's lives, the very awe her name had inspired was fast dying out. And no wonder. Seventy years had almost rounded their circuit since the sea made its obliterating inroad upon Slaith. Cuthbert's youngest grandchild, Hilda Sanderson, was a blooming maiden of eighteen—golden haired, fresh coloured, firm of foot, and round of limb—as ready to wade in the surf as a water nymph ; and she carried on her shoulders the wicker fish creel, suspended by its strap across her forehead, with a grace peculiarly her own.

Eighteen. And nine years had gone since she, her grandfather's pet, had, for the last time, wandered with him on the shore, and drunk in his never-failing recital, as, with his stick, he pointed to the end of the Neb where the ship went down ; marked out, as on a map, every detail of the scenes he had witnessed ; and cautioned her, as she hoped to prosper, never to form a friendship or have any dealings with a Rae.

Eighteen—and the youngest representative of the Raes had come a wooing to her !

During his lifetime Cuthbert Blackburn's own children, in obedience to his behest, had held aloof from the Raes. But his grandchildren had felt his interdict a hardship ; since avoidance of the Raes meant (to the lads at least) exclusion from companionship and from such sports and games as called for numbers, and of which one or other of the two Raes was almost sure to be leader.

Certainly Hilda's brothers held out the right hand of fellowship to Stephen Rae almost over their grandfather's grave, but surreptitiously, and no one at home was the wiser.

Hilda, seeing the lads together, put in a protest in memory of her grandfather, and their cousin, Robert Blackburn, set his face against the new friendship ; but all to no purpose. He himself had, in time, to go with the stream or be left in a minority. And even Hilda, when she grew old enough and strong enough to be sent to the beck for water, was not sorry to find a stronger arm ready to carry the full pail down the hill in her stead.

The Blackburns' cottage no longer looked down from an elevation on the village. It now stood with the Sandersons', almost in the front rank, with a sea-wall as a protection at the edge of the rock

On a higher level the Raes had built, and their footpath to the beach skirted the tumbling mountain stream; and so it came about that, without design, Stephen was so often at hand to do her a service.

That he proffered his services might be due to her pretty face; that she accepted them might be set down as much to the careless, matter-of-fact, yet masterful manner in which he had possessed himself of her pail in the first instance, as to his black eyes and curly head.

He was five years her senior, and the girl of fifteen, taken by surprise, submitted with something akin to fear in her breast, following him down the steep path with an eerie misgiving of evil to come, and answering his few brief remarks with mere monosyllables. She scarcely said "Thank you" as he set down the pail almost at her own door, and, without waiting even for those curt thanks, proceeded on his way to the beach with a net over his shoulder, whistling as he went.

His shadow darkened the cottage window as he stooped to set down the pail.

"Who was that?" asked Maggy Sanderson, looking up from her wash-tub.

"Stephen Rae, mother," she answered, half afraid of a rebuke.

"And what brought thee with Stephen Rae? Thy gronfeyther Blackburn would have given thee a word of a sort had he seen thee wi' one o' them folk, for a' they be better off than ourselves."

Hilda was conscious of this.

"I could not help it, mother. He took up the bucket, and was off with it down the hill before I could get out a word."

"Weel, lass, it was but neighbourly; an' if thou didn't throw thyself in the lad's way, thou'rt noan to blame." And the energetic woman made the soapsuds fly as she rubbed away at a blue guernsey, and went on saying: "Will and Cuddy say we ha' no right to cast up to Peter and Steve what their great-gronfeyther was, an' that thy gronfeyther's tale was half superstition an' half prejudice, an' that it's time old animosities died out. May be it is. Me an' thy feyther have talked it over mony a time; an' though it did look like a judgment when old Peter was drowned, as his forbears were afore him, thy feyther said that, forbye a bit o' smuggling, nobody knew aught again him. An' it's noan Christian-like to turn a cold shoulder to the lads, seeing they're so good to the poor mother, though they do come of a bad stock. But, surely lass, thou needn't stand still while I talk. You might have had them potatoes peeled by this time, an' ready for the pot."

The bustling matron's reproof was not ill-timed. Hilda's knife went round the roots somewhat mechanically and slowly. She was thinking more of her mother's speech than of her occupation. It was a tolerant reversal of all preconceived notions and old beliefs—a doubt thrown on Grandfather Blackburn's theory of ill-luck as the White Woman's legacy to the Raes—a blow struck at the roots of prejudice and superstitious fear.

She hurried over the potatoes ; set them to boil, and with them a dish of silvery fresh herrings, then carried the basket of newly-washed clothes to the beach, and spread them out on the shingle to dry, strewing pebbles over them to keep them down.

But all the while her mother's speech was in her mind, and consequently Stephen Rae : a conjunction Maggy Sanderson had scarcely contemplated.

When next she, on her way from the spring, in her pink half-gown and blue woollen petticoat, was overtaken by Stephen, much of her eerie dread had disappeared, and something of girlish shyness, which kept her tongue-tied, had taken its place. Whatever her mood, if he chanced to overtake her on her way from the spring, he was certain to possess himself of her pail, and carry it down the hill, no matter what other burden he might have, and he was seldom empty-handed.

And he always stepped on briskly in advance, as if to show that, though willing to serve her, he had no desire to obtrude in the way of conversation. After a time she caught herself admiring the manliness of his bearing, the careless ease with which he bore the brimming pail down the rugged path, nor spilled a drop, though, it might be, a cable or a net was slung across his shoulder ; and she was prone to contrast his black curls with her brothers' red locks. At such times she would take herself to task and resolve to avoid him as her dead grandfather had enjoined. But she could neither shut her eyes nor her ears, and she found herself looking and listening for his step, and when he was not there feeling a sense of disappointment which made her angry with herself.

Her brothers had long rallied her on her sweetheart, heedless of her angry disclaimer, and her cousin, Robert Blackburn, had provoked her even to tears with his bitter taunts of barefaced impropriety in running after one of the Raes. But neither her brother nor Robert would accept her challenge to fetch water in her stead. Robert tried it for a week or ten days, but he soon found the task incompatible with his daily duty.

She was nearly seventeen before she would admit to herself that Stephen was more to her than a friend, and quite seventeen before he claimed a higher privilege.

He had watched her step by step on her way to womanhood, noted her modesty, her industry, and made himself sure of a place in her heart before he asked for it. Nay, he might have waited longer still had he not seen Robert Blackburn haunting her like a shadow, with all the facilities which cousinship and adjoining dwellings could give.

She had now to take her part with the women on the narrowed beach in unloading and preparing the fish for market and the curing-house : and as he saw red-haired Robert always at her side to lighten her labours, and was conscious she had avoided him of late, he had a salutary reminder that he might dally a little too long.

Accordingly he loitered on the path by the beach, and saw more than one damsel fill her pail and cast coquettish glances his way; but Hilda came not. He saw her busy on the beach, or leaning over the sea-wall in conversation with her brothers or Robert; but she scarcely looked towards him, and only nodded when he called to her.

In fact, she was avoiding him, fetching water when the boats were out or preparing to sail, having taken herself to task with a will.

Stephen was not easily baffled. He had gone down to the shore in his sea-boots and sailing gear, and was helping Peter to make all trim aboard the yawl, with an eye on Sanderson's cottage, when he suddenly professed to have left something at home, and set off in a hurry, leaving Peter, the two men, and the boy to get all right and tight without him.

He did not slacken his pace until he was fairly out of sight; then he stepped along at leisure and, where practicable, on the soft turf. Hilda was some paces in advance, toiling along in the hot sun with her empty pail as wearily as if it had been filled to the brim with lead.

The spring gushed cold and clear from the rock in a sheltered nook among heather and hart's-tongue fern, a few paces from the beck to which it was tributary, and here Hilda seated herself on a stone in a drooping attitude, sighed heavily, and clasped her knees with both hands as if forgetful of her errand.

A hand upon her shoulder made her start. She turned, and met the gaze of Stephen with eyes that sank before the new light in his.

"Where have you hid yourself, Hilda, the last fortnight? I had a fairing for you, and had never a chance to offer it."

"I do not want a fairing. I—I would rather not have it," faltered she, going alternately cold and hot, as he pulled a gay silk kerchief from his pocket and proceeded to tie it under her chin, saying as he did so, "Yes, you do, and will give me a kiss for it." And holding her face between his two hands, as if to look how her new head-gear became her, he lifted it up to meet the kiss he had ready for her lips.

Her modesty took fright. Never before had he by act or word overstepped the bounds of propriety. She struggled to free herself.

His arm was around her, but the clasp was that of tenderness, not power.

"Nay, Hilda," said he, "I have brought you something more than a fairing. I have brought you a true heart and honest love, and I want yours in return. And now, my lass, how is it to be?"

Hilda was not a fine lady to swoon in her lover's arms, but she had been caught in a melancholy mood, and she certainly grew sick and dizzy, half doubting her own happiness, half dreading the evils her grandsire had prognosticated. She was, however, too honest to keep him very long in doubt, and had coyly given him back his kiss,

when a loud halloo farther down the beck reminded him that the tide was on the turn, and that Hilda's pail was still empty.

Home went Hilda in a sort of dream, to be taken sharply to task for loitering; but Hilda's ears were impervious to sharp words since the magical sweetness of love had been breathed into them. It was not until the bright kerchief on her head attracted her mother's eye that she was awakened from her trance of new delight.

"Where did thee get that thing?"

There was not a colour in the silken square so brilliant as that which flushed her face as, with a sudden flash of recollection, her hand went up to her head. She had forgotten her adornment in thinking of the giver.

There was no longer hope of concealment.

"Steve Rae gave it me for a fairing," she faltered.

"An' what business had thou to take fairings from Steve Rae. Pull the thing off this minute. What would Robert say if he saw thee wearing aught that had come through Steve's fingers?"

"It's naught to Robert what I wear," jerked out Hilda, conscious that her cousin had assumed a right of dictatorship not conceded by herself; but she removed the offending head-gear nevertheless.

When the boats came in the next morning with a great take of fish, the goodwife was too busy to think of the "fairing." And by the time Maggy Sanderson bethought to broach the matter to her good man, as he smoked his long pipe in the nook, their two sons were in Steve's confidence and prepared to do battle in his behalf.

It was not so tough a contest as Hilda had expected. Her father puffed away, asked for a sight of the handkerchief, turned it over, held it to the light, felt its texture, and with the air of a connoisseur decided "that were noan bought at a fair, and it's never been smuggled in thy time or mine, Maggy."

"I only hope he came by it honestly," suggested Maggy, with an expressive jerk of the head.

"That I'm sure he did!" put in Hilda promptly, resenting the impeachment of her sweetheart.

"So am I," supplemented Cuthbert. "Peter and Steve overhauled everything when their father was drowned, and they came across lots of queer things stowed away in a sort of cellar in the rock, that had never seen daylight in their memory, or their mother's either—a mouldy box of women's tackle amongst the rest. It fell to pieces as they moved it, the fastenings were so eaten away with rust. They thought it had been in the water. I'll be bound the handkercher came out o' that."

"Mebbe so, Cuddy. When I were a lad, folks told queer tales of the old Raes and what they had in hiding-holes. But I've heard naught again the lads, though they do come of a bad crew. And as for Steve, if it were not for Robert ——"

Here both Cuddy and Will launched out in praise of Steve; the

end being tacit permission for Hilda to retain possession of her fairing, and to wear it openly with her best clothes on Sundays, greatly to the chagrin of Robert Blackburn, who counted over his savings with a rueful perception of their inadequacy to compete with Stephen Rae in the way of love-gifts.

Certainly a countess might have envied Hilda that Oriental kerchief worn by the fisher-maid in all simplicity, its value to her being only estimable as a token of Stephen's love.

Had she known whence it came, or by whom it had been worn, she would have cast it from her with a shudder. Blissfully ignorant, she walked from church, with Stephen by her side, in a flutter of pride and joy, damped—but only for the moment—by the sight of Robert Blackburn's mournful aspect as he leaned over the low parapet wall, looking drearily out to sea.

"Happy the wooing that's not long a doing! When's it to be, Hilda, lass? There's our Peter married, and Bet—it's quite time thee and me were spliced."

Steve was lying at full length, chest downwards, on the shingle, as he spoke; his elbows buried in the smooth pebbles; his upturned chin resting on his brown palms, his black eyes fixed on the face of Hilda as she—the week's work over—leaned against the stern of a boat turned keel uppermost.

"I don't know," answered Hilda irresolutely. "Mother says there's no room under Peter's roof for me. Two sons' wives and their mother on one hearth would make it too hot for the men."

"Aye, aye, like enough. But there'd be room enough for thee and me on our own hearth, dearie. I know where there's a snug cottage to be had, so you've only to say the word, and by the time the banns are out, there shall be a home ready for us. What dost say? Shall I put up the banns next week?"

"Ask father. I don't mind," replied Hilda shyly.

"Do you mind trying on these? You see, Hilda, when a fellow has made up his mind it's best to have everything ready," and he held up a massive wedding ring and keeper, the latter of curious workmanship, though neither was new.

He had her hand in his clasp, had slipped both rings upon her finger, and was raising himself to snatch a kiss, when she suddenly started to her feet, with her eyes fixed on the point of the Neb, and the startled cry, "What's that?"

The evening shades had been deepening unheeded whilst they lingered on the beach, but there on the summit of the bleak promontory she beheld a shadowy shape which thrilled her soul with fear. "What is that?" she repeated in a whisper, pointing with her finger as she spoke.

"What? Where?" questioned Stephen, in perplexity.

"That figure on the Neb?"

"I see nothing but the mist and spray. We'd best go in. The wind's rising, and we're like to have a rough night of it."

A rough night it was, but Stephen laughed at her belief that she had seen the White Woman, and said he knew the thing had never been more than mist and foam and fancy; he thought she had had more sense than to believe old women's tales.

His masterful manner kept her silent, but she could not conquer her impressions; and though she carried the two gold rings sewn in her bodice, and loved him, if possible, with a deeper and stronger affection, she put off the actual date of her marriage from time to time as if afraid to venture.

Robert Blackburn had something to do with this. Never a stormy night came but he protested he saw the White Woman hovering about the Neb, but as "nothing came of it," and no one else saw more than a wreath of mist, the village laughed him to scorn, until he held his peace and kept his previsions to himself. Yet neither Hilda Sanderson nor Hilda's mother joined the coarse mirth at his expense.

Steve had taken a pretty cottage, had fitted it up to receive his bride, not only with common appliances, but with one or two rare old things brought from some secret hoard, a carved oak coffer among the rest; had put up the banns and waited impatiently for her to fix the day. And as she put it off and put it off from time to time, for no earthly reason but that she "was afraid," he began to grow jealous of Robert Blackburn and his influence.

On Peter's marriage there had been some talk of having a new yawl built; and now it lay at its moorings on the beach; the finest and largest craft that had ever belonged to Slaith.

In proof of good will, and the better to bring Hilda to reason, the Rae brothers offered to take the Sanderson brothers into partnership, an offer Cuddy and Willy were only too glad to accept, having long aspired to something beyond their father's coble.

Their generosity overpowered Hilda; banished Maggy's last objection; the wedding-day was fixed; they were to be married on the Sunday.

On the previous Thursday the yawl called the "United Brothers" was to make its trial trip, an extra man and boy completing the crew, with Peter as master.

That morning early Hilda wakened with a shiver. She had dreamed that Stephen placed the wedding-ring and its keeper on her finger, when the White Woman came between them and plucked it off. There was no more chance of sleep. The very moonlight streaming through her lattice seemed to mock her. For the first time the atmosphere of the narrow room seemed to stifle her.

To breathe more freely and shake off her fears she lifted the latch of the front door and stepped across the path to the sea wall.

Was she still dreaming, or had her fancy conjured up a ghost to

haunt her? There in the pale moonlight the tall, ethereal form of a woman robed in white, with a hood or shawl of densest black, was slowly making the circuit of the "United Brothers," one shadowy hand gliding over the smooth surface of the hull. Too much appalled to scream, Hilda gasped for breath. Her head swam. She clutched the low wall for support. Another moment and the weird figure was gone.

Back to her bed she crept, stunned and terrified. A sort of stupor bound her senses. Then she slept so heavily, the shrill voice of her mother rebuking laziness could scarcely rouse her.

Once awake all the terrors of the night came back to her. Her first impulse was to seek her brothers and Steve, tell them all she had dreamed and seen, and implore them not to launch the new yawl that day.

Her brothers listened and looked one at another in doubt. Peter Rae frowned, and asked her how fishermen were to live and keep their families if they stayed ashore when their wives had bad dreams. He scouted the idea that it was anything more than a dream.

Her appeal had more effect on Steve, to whom she clung in entreaty, though he too held that she was the dupe of her own fancy. Her pale face and tearful eyes unnerved him. He was half inclined to hold back, and induce the others to put off the trial of the new boat until after the wedding.

She saw her advantage, and to clinch her argument reminded him that Robert Blackburn had seen the White Woman, more than once.

Jealous Steve set his teeth sternly.

"Oh! Robert Blackburn! There, that's enough, my lass. I want none of Robert Blackburn's hand on our tiller; and shall not wait his breath for a fair wind. You'd best go up to our house and have all put to rights for the wedding; and remember you're mistress there till I come back—or, if I never come back." He said this with his ordinary lightness; drew from his pocket a curious necklet, with a heart-shaped locket, clasped it round her throat as a wedding gift and with a hearty kiss said she was to wear it for his sake. But he would hear no more of keeping back the boat, either for Robert Blackburn or the White Woman, whilst the sky was clear and wind and tide in their favour.

Wind and tide in their favour. The "United Brothers" slipped her cable, set her helm, spread her brown sails to the breeze, and with all her nets in readiness, breasted the dancing waves as if proud that the antipathies of generations were at an end, and she bore the proof.

Wind and tide in their favour. A peaceful twilight. A promising nightfall. Only a low mist creeping over the waters. Women and children sleeping calmly as the waves.

What was that?

The invisible hand of a hurricane shaking the windows and doors

of Slaith. Billows battering and breaking over the sea-wall in foam. A blacker midnight never roused a population to wait in fear and trembling for the morn.

And there, on the extreme point of the Neb, the only thing distinctly visible in the darkness, clearly outlined, stood the White Woman, slowly and majestically waving her arms as if in exultation.

Other eyes than Hilda's saw, other hearts than Hilda's sank with prehension.

The swift storm was over; the turbulent wreck-strewn sea was at rest. One by one the fishing-boats came home, some laden, some empty; all in sorry plight, and all late.

All? No, not all. Robert Blackburn had piloted old Sander-son's coble safely mid the rocks and shallows. But what of the "United Brothers"?

There was never a wedding-day for Hilda. Brothers and betrothed had sailed together and sunk together, and with them had perished all her hopes.

Grey-haired as her own mother, she wept as she recalled, too late, her grandfather Cuthbert's warning for all of his honest kith and kin to "steer clear of the Raes," and bitterly reiterated that her "dream had indeed come true—the White Woman *had* torn her wedding-ring from her finger!"

"Aye, and wrecked the last of the Raes and those who dared to claim brotherhood with them," cried Robert Blackburn remorselessly. "You knew the White Woman's silent curse lay on those who let her die unaided, and the good ship go down with every human soul for the sake of spoil. Yet you suffered Steve Rae to adorn you with finery from the wreck, and bind you to himself with the rings his forbear Peter Rae cut from the dead woman's fingers. You did not know it? You knew they were never honest gains, and the Raes were a bad lot. You had better have been content with a poorer mate and a good name."

"I shall never mate. Poor or rich, good or bad, I shall take no man's name," said Hilda with a shudder.

She kept her word, and, keeping it, has kept alive the dread of the White Woman of the Wreck among the fisher-folk of Slaith.



COLIN CLOUT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MOLLY: A SKETCH IN THREE TONES."

AT eighteen Alicia Grand had consented to become Alicia Little. She had yielded to the earnest entreaties of Mr. Little, but she always declared herself ill-matched, and pronounced it impossible to be happy with a man who was not famous. As the years advanced, Mr. Little felt that, in wooing Miss Grand so strenuously that she had been compelled to yield, he had performed an action of peculiar baseness, only to be overlooked at all by the fact of its having been committed in the almost juvenile days of his twenty-second year.

"But perhaps I shall be famous yet," he said, sometimes.

"No, no," replied Alicia, sadly. "It is too unlikely. You won't go into Parliament, and there is nothing else you can do."

"But I have no taste for Parliament," said Mr. Little. "If I am to be famous, it must be as Nature dictates. You know one could not expect everyone to be like your favourite—Colin Clout."

"Oh! don't name Colin Clout," cried the wife, raising her hands in entreaty. "Your lips seem to profane his existence. Colin Clout is a splendid poet. He will soon be *the* poet of the time. You can't understand his poetry, and you should not speak of him. With me it is different. I have been a poetess from my birth."

Alicia had indeed written some very fine poems, of great length, and in blank verse; but their success had not been very great, and publishers, though polite, had been unappreciative.

But she was wont to send copies of her poems to six unknown friends, three poets and three poetesses, whose acquaintance she had formed through the perusal of their verses in papers and magazines and with whom she corresponded diligently, notwithstanding that the names of some of them were even less poetic and euphonious than her own. She had been married several years when Colin Clout, the poet whose fame waxed greater with every line he wrote, published a volume bearing the somewhat curious title of "His Poems." But its contents were incomparable. The book was in everyone's hand, it was the theme of every tongue. Alicia purchased it and learnt much of it by heart, keeping it carefully from her husband.

"I could not bear you to touch it, my dear," she said, putting it behind her back.

"Why not?" he asked.

"How often have I told you that you had no soul, no ideas," said Alicia. "You, who can sit scribbling on the back of an envelope, amidst

a chattering crowd, cannot conceive the creative moment, when the poet, wrapped in solitude, *forces* words to express his thoughts."

"No, I cannot," said Mr. Little, frankly.

"Then what would be the good of my allowing you to read 'His Poem '?" said Alicia.

"At least, you might read them to me," he urged. Whereupon Alicia consented so far as to read aloud the opening dedication to the poet's wife.

"Matchless," she murmured, as she closed the book.

"Spoilt by that comma at the end of the third line," remarked Mr. Little. "It should have been a semi-colon. I don't think very much of Colin Clout, if this is all he can do."

Alicia hardly deigned a reply. A slight shiver ran through her frame. Undoubtedly, if her husband assumed the position of a poetical critic, her only refuge was in silence. She took up her pen, and began to write.

"I have invited my friends here on Sunday," she observed, coldly. "We have never yet met, but it so happens we are all in town now, and we mean to unite in offering congratulations and homage to Colin Clout on the appearance of 'His Poems.'"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Little. "You are going to have the Budes and Butchers, and all the rest of them, here!"

"Yes," said Alicia, reddening faintly. "But we have all taken noms de plume, to prevent the cruel necessity of speaking each other's names, which are mostly so barbarous. My poetess friends are no longer Miss Butcher, Miss Flint, and Mrs. Buzzard, but Clarinda, Daphne, and Sappho; while Mr. Budge, Mr. Salmon, and Mr. Lushington, have become Narcissus, Florimel, and Eugenius."

"And what are you, dearest?" asked Mr. Little, with great interest.

"They are good enough to call me Thalia," she said, modestly. She resumed her pen, but after dipping it into the ink several times she still wrote nothing.

"What are you doing?" asked her husband. "Could I help you?"

Alicia started. "No indeed," she said. "I am writing a few appropriate lines to celebrate our first meeting; but, though I do sadly want a rhyme, it is of no use your offering assistance. Poets, my poor husband, are *born*, not *made*."

But when Sunday arrived, Alicia's sonnet of inauguration was ready, and she herself seated in state to receive her guests.

"Ah!" she was thinking, fixing her bright expectant eyes on the door. "Now I shall have an hour of really delightful converse. It thrills my soul to think of the poetic minds with whom I shall soon be in actual contact."

Sappho, in the person of Mrs. Buzzard, was the first to arrive. she was a tall, gaunt woman, with blue spectacles and a dusty dress,

and an air of timidity, as if the man who had given her the right to sign her name Buzzard was accustomed to exercise certain rights of his own with a too untangible reserve.

"My dear Thalia," she said, in a low hurried voice, "the pleasure of this meeting is beyond the expression of words. I have brought a little poem to express my appreciation of your uncommon talents, and the uncommon talents of our brothers and sisters. But I will reserve it. I see I come, like the dawn in summer, almost too soon."

"Never too soon, dear Sappho," murmured Alicia.

"There is one thing I should like to say before the others come," said Sappho, hastily, and nervously looking over her shoulder from time to time, as if she saw the form of Mr. Buzzard in some remote corner. "The cherished companion of your walk through life's shade and sunshine—does he approve?"

The opportune arrival of Mr. Budge at this moment saved Alicia the necessity of a reply, and she had scarcely welcomed him, and introduced him to Sappho, when Mr. Lushington appeared; and was immediately followed by the entrance of Miss Butcher, Miss Flint, and Mr. Salmon.

"We have two pleasures before us," said Alicia, smiling round her. "First, to testify our unspeakable admiration of Colin Clout, and then to delight in the poems which we have, each one, produced especially for this occasion. Mr. Salmon—Florimel—I beg you to be seated."

For Florimel, apparently the oldest, and indubitably the stoutest, of the group, remained standing.

"My good madam," he said huskily, and with some irritation, "I am seventy! you can't expect seventy years to repose themselves upon low chairs and divans—like these!"

Eugenius, whose appearance was characterised by an extreme pallor and fragility, looked disgusted. Clarinda and Daphne, who were friends, and had come together, leaned back in their chairs with gestures of abhorrence.

"Mr. Budge, pray ring the bell," said Alicia. "A more convenient chair shall be brought. I am so sorry, Mr. Salmon, but——"

"You did not think I was so antique and unwieldy," said the old gentleman, crossly. "People never do think. I beg you, madam, to tell me how I could have furnished the Poet's Corner for the *Conversationalist* for the last fifty years, if I were not seventy?"

"We were not aware you had done so," said Miss Butcher.

But a chair suitable to the needs of embonpoint being now procured, a degree of harmony fell upon the scene, and the poets and poetesses looked expectantly at Alicia.

"If Thalia would unlock her lips," suggested Mr. Lushington, theatrically.

"We are met together, dear poet friends," began Alicia, "to con-

gratulate ourselves, the world, and the author, upon the appearance of a volume of poems of unsurpassed beauty, by Colin Clout."

"Unsurpassed *as yet*," corrected Miss Butcher. "I know of but one work to supersede it, and that is 'The Remains of Daphne,' as yet unpublished, but to be committed to the press by me, after the death of my friend, Miss Flint."

"After my death," said Miss Flint, who looked many years younger than Miss Butcher.

"Madam," said Mr. Salmon, with sarcasm, "may you live a thousand years!"

"Narcissus," interrupted Alicia, quickly, and turning to that personage, a sad looking gentleman of about forty, whose ill-fitting clothes and haggard appearance seemed to bespeak poverty, or a strange caprice: "Narcissus, you have hardly spoken. Do you not think we may consider 'His Poems' an unsurpassed work, and congratulate Colin Clout accordingly?"

Thus addressed, Mr. Budge glanced nervously at the four ladies, and then said, "Yes, yes! Anything you like, Thalia! anything!—pray do so!—yes, yes!"

"What rhymes with *surpass*, ladies and gentlemen?" threw in Florimel, at this juncture.

Alicia and Eugenius smiled. Thus encouraged, Sappho smiled too. Florimel laughed aloud.

"If Thalia is going to encourage such coarse frivolity," exclaimed Clarinda, "Daphne and I must take our leave."

"No, no," cried Alicia. "Pray don't be vexed, Clarinda. I am sure Florimel meant nothing."

"*Lass* rhymes with *surpass* as well as *ass*," observed Sappho, timidly. Those who had laughed before laughed again; those who had frowned before frowned now. Sappho was painfully conscious of having made matters worse by her unfortunate remark.

"The business in hand," continued Alicia, "is to offer our congratulations to Colin Clout on his unsurpassed work——"

"Thalia!" said Eugenius, "most deferentially, but with absolute firmness, I beg to say that if the word *unsurpassed* be adhered to, I must sorrowfully decline to affix my signature to the memorial."

"But what can we say instead?" asked Alicia, vexed, but preserving her good humour.

Keep to *unsurpassed*, by all means," said Florimel. "I shall not sign it if it be altered. As to Eugenius, the poem he refers to as surpassing Colin Clout is his own sheepish pastoral, which the *Weekly Idyllic* has been weak enough to publish."

Alicia knew not what to do. But after a momentary pause, a bright idea struck her.

Perhaps we had better read our poems first," she said, "We can sign the memorial presently. Clarinda, may I call upon you to begin?"

Clarinda readily acquiesced, and proceeded, in blank verse, to describe a storm, and then a calm, in language equally well-chosen.

The reading had continued for about a quarter of an hour—for the poem was long—when a sudden deep and sonorous sound disturbed the tranquillity of the little party. Sappho looked apprehensively at Florimel, and put her finger to her lips.

"Oh! pray don't wake him!" she murmured. "Pray do not rouse him from his rosy dreams!"

"He snores," pronounced Eugenius.

"He is asleep, you know," said Narcissus, with a feeble desire to make things clear.

Clarinda folded up her manuscript with much parade. "Intolerable coarseness," she ejaculated.

"Why should the reading stop?" asked Alicia, rather anxiously. "If Florimel does not care to listen, it is his loss alone."

But the steadfast Clarinda shook her head. An unpardonable affront had been offered to her. "I read no more," she said.

Alicia begged the others to proceed, and this they did in turn; but the sleeping form of Florimel, and the icy demeanour of the two outraged ladies, seemed to lie like wet blankets on the little assembly. Sappho read first. Clarinda and Daphne listened to the simple doggerel with an almost audible scorn. Alicia herself was glad that the piece possessed, at least, the merit of brevity.

"Thank you," she exclaimed, cheerfully. "Those are very pretty lines, dear Sappho. Daphne, may we now call upon you?" But Daphne would not read.

"She cannot read while that monster sleeps," announced Clarinda.

Half-amused, half-disgusted, Alicia begged the gentlemen to bring forward their productions, whereupon Eugenius, standing, and with much oratorical effect, recited a poem which he had entitled "The Murderer," and which was very terrible, and greatly resembled "Eugene Aram." As no one remarked upon this, however, Eugenius re-seated himself, with satisfaction.

Narcissus' poem was called "Place aux Dames," and opened by asserting that—

Ladies are like radiant roses,
Men are grovelling worms,—

whereat Sappho shivered visibly, and seemed to imply that, whatever women *might* be in brighter spheres, she had never discovered anything grovelling or worm-like in the men she knew best, and notably not in the one whose name she bore.

"Thank you, Narcissus," said Alicia. "You are very chivalrous. I suppose," she added, "there is no good in waiting for Florimel."

"Oh no! let us not intrude on the realms of his balmy slumbers," said Sappho.

"Will not the honeyed lips of Thalia read her own poem to us?" insinuated Eugenius.

Acquiescing, Alicia opened the portfolio in which she had left her sonnet. But it was gone, and in its place lay an unpretending sheet of note-paper, on which she knew no verse of hers had ever been transcribed. Nevertheless, a sonnet was there, and it was signed by the name of Colin Clout.

"Something very strange has happened," cried Alicia. "I cannot account for it, or explain it; but it is most extraordinary. I placed a sonnet of my own in this portfolio this morning. It has been spirited away, and, lo! a sonnet of Colin Clout's has replaced it!"

"I imagine that Colin Clout is an acquaintance of Thalia's," observed Clarinda, frigidly. "Probably the explanation is in that fact."

"I do not know him. I have never seen him. I do not even know his real name," cried Alicia. "Loath as I am to admit the possibility of miracles, I own I regard this occurrence with superstition. But the sonnet, however it came here, is unsurpassed. Let me read it."

She began to read hastily, lest Eugenius should again quarrel with the adjective she had adopted; but all were spell-bound, for the sonnet was one of incomparable beauty; and so graceful was the tribute which Colin Clout therein paid to the poet-souls at the moment assembled, that even Clarinda and Daphne murmured applause. The little burst of enthusiasm woke Florimel, who sat up with a start, and asked what time it was.

Sappho hastened to explain what had happened, and then Alicia, at the instance of Florimel, read the sonnet again.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" said Florimel, with a sigh. "My own chorus would not be supportable after it."

"But do read it," said Alicia, gently.

"No; it would be too humiliating," said Florimel. "We must sink when Colin Clout is present."

"I feel it," said Alicia, fervently. She rang for tea, and the poets began to talk in groups.

"Thalia," said Eugenius, coming forward, "I am quite willing to sign the memorial now. After hearing that sonnet, I admit that Colin Clout is an unsurpassed poet. I have written nothing to compare with it."

"I imagine not," said Florimel, dryly.

"Narcissus will sign also," said Eugenius.

"Yes, yes," stammered Narcissus; "if the ladies do so, I'll do it."

"I sign, of course," said Alicia, in a clear voice; "and Sappho will sign too, I am sure; and, dear Clarinda, you and Daphne?"

The three ladies advanced.

"Until the 'Remains' I mentioned before are published," said Clarinda, "I consider Colin Clout's poems to be unsurpassed. After that publication, things will wear a different aspect; but at this hour I sign without reluctance."

"Then we are all agreed," said Alicia. And the real business of the meeting was concluded.

When the guests had departed, Mr. Little ventured into the drawing-room, where he found his wife looking flushed and fatigued.

"I am afraid you are very tired, my darling," he said, taking her hand. "But I hope you have enjoyed your friends. Tell me how you got on."

"Well, they all agreed to sign the memorial at last," said Alicia, somewhat dejectedly. "But they disappointed me. Their conversation was not a bit more poetical than—than yours, and their behaviour was less so; for you are always agreeable and polite, and they were all either rude or awkward."

Mr. Little smiled. "You must expect eccentricities from born poets," he remarked.

"Nonsense, my dear," cried Alicia. "They are no more born poets than you are. As for me, I am never going to write a line again—*never!*"

"Well! was the sonnet of inauguration appreciated?" asked Mr. Little.

"That is a great mystery," said Alicia, in a low voice. "My poem has vanished, and in its stead I found the most exquisite sonnet of Colin Clout's. How could it have got into my portfolio?"

"I put it there, dear one."

"You?"

"Yes," said Mr. Little. "I know Colin Clout very well, and I got him to write a sonnet, on purpose to please you. You had better give me the memorial to make over to him."

"What!" cried Alicia, at last finding words. "You know Colin Clout! Why have you never told me so before, O most unpoetical husband? Why, why have you never introduced him to me?"

"Because he is not the sort of man you like."

"How do you know?" she asked, impatiently.

"He is very like me, dearest."

"Impossible!"

"Indeed, it is true. We are as like as twin brothers."

"I cannot believe it," said Alicia, emphatically.

"But, my darling, listen to me. I have often been on the point of telling you before, but something has always stayed me. I know not whether poets are born or made, but I have written poetry all my life, and now I am proud to tell my wife that her husband is famous, for—*he is Colin Clout!*"

And the poet kissed away the penitent tears that started into Alicia's eyes, and the penitent words that rose to her lips.

GREAT WRITERS AT WORK.

HOW delightful it would be to trace the evolvments of "The Canterbury Tales," or "The Faërie Queen," from the first germ of conception through its various stages to completion—to learn exactly how it was written, under what circumstances and conditions; whether the ideas easily shaped themselves into words, or whether there was much blotting and erasing and rewriting before it assumed the exquisite form in which we possess the poem.

Much of Chaucer's work was undoubtedly meditated out in the meads, among the flowers, in the early morning. In his portrait of himself, as the clerk of Oxenford, he tells us that he had at his bed's head "twenty bookes clothed in black and red," which certainly indicates that he was addicted to "waste the midnight oil." Chaucer was a busy man of the world, a soldier, a courtier, an envoy. He held offices under the State and sat in Parliament, and probably it was only in the late hours of the night that he found time for literary composition.

Of Spenser we know too little even for conjectures. "The Faërie Queen" is supposed to have been conceived and commenced during his sojourn at Court; but the greater portion was written at Kilcolman, the ancient castle of the proscribed Desmonds, whose lands had been obtained for him through Sydney's interest.

It was a savage, romantic building, rising on the shores of a lake, and the great plain in which it stood was surrounded by distant ranges of wooded mountains. Never was poet's lot cast in a situation more congenial to his task. Within those gray walls the common places of civilization could have had no existence for him. He lived in a world of romance and superstition, peopled by the eerie creatures of the wild Celtic fancy: he wandered daily in the gloomy forests he described, where every ruin, and cave, and weird haunt had its legend. Amidst such scenes the beautiful, the terrible, and the grotesque forms of his imagination must have become more real to him than the realities of that artificial world of man from which he was so utterly separated.

What would we not give to know how Shakspeare's masterpieces were composed—to trace "Macbeth" or "Lear," "Othello" or "Hamlet," from its first suggestion to its perfect form! Probably we should be disappointed by its simplicity, for, of all men of genius, Shakspeare appears to have had the least of eccentricity or strangeness. The greater number of his plays were written in London—or, at least, evidence is in favour of such a conclusion, for with the scanty information we possess we can never pronounce with certainty upon any

points that relate to Shakspeare—written amidst the prosaic duties of theatre-manager and actor. We know that he was a lover of society and of good cheer, that he liked to spend his evenings at "The Devil" or "The Mermaid." These duties and recreations must have left him little time for composition—only the late hours of the night or the early morning. It is said that he never blotted a line: perhaps each one was perfected before it was committed to paper.

We all know how "Paradise Lost" was written. There is no more distinct picture of the author at work in literary history than that of the severe figure of the blind poet giving forth his immortal utterances to the pens of his daughters. "When he first rose," says Johnson, "he heard a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and then studied till twelve; then took some exercise for an hour, then dined; then played on the organ, and sang, or heard another sing; then studied till six; then entertained his visitors till eight, then supped; and, after a pipe of tobacco and a glass of water, went to bed. When he did not care to rise early he had something read to him by his bedside; perhaps at this time his daughters were employed. He composed much in the morning, and dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in a chair, with his leg thrown over the arm."

How Dryden, the next great poet in succession, worked, I cannot find recorded; doubtless at any time and all times, whenever the need of money pressed him. Pope always required his writing-desk to be set upon his bed before he rose. Gray, the author of the *Elegy*, was perhaps of all writers the most curiously minute in his method: it is said that he perfected each line separately, amending and rewriting it over and over again, and never commenced another until the first had wholly satisfied his fastidious taste.

Byron sat down to write without any premeditation: his ideas flowed with his ink, and one line suggested the next. But after the poem was completed, and during its passage through the press, he was continually altering, interlining, and adding. The first copy of "The Giaour" consisted of only four hundred lines; to each new edition were added new passages, until it swelled to nearly fourteen hundred lines. During the printing of "The Bride of Abydos" he added two hundred lines, and many of the original were altered again and again.

One of the most constantly laborious writers of whom we have any account was Southey. In one of his letters he says: "Imagine me in this great study of mine (at Gesta Hall, Keswick) from breakfast till dinner, from dinner till tea, and from tea till supper, in my old black coat, my corduroys alternated with the long worsted pantaloons and gaiters in one, and the green shade, and sitting at my desk, and you have my picture and my history. . . . My actions are as regular as those of Saint Dunstan's quarter bags. Three pages of history after breakfast; then to transcribe and copy for press, or to make my selections and biographies, or what else suits my humour

till dinner time ; from dinner till tea I read, write letters, see the newspaper, and very often indulge in a siesta. After tea I go to poetry, and correct and rewrite and copy till I am tired, and then turn to anything till supper ; and this is my life, which, if it be not a merry one, is yet as happy as heart could wish."

In striking contrast to this wholly sedentary life was that of his neighbour and fellow poet, Wordsworth. His poems were composed during his long morning walks upon the mountains, surrounded by the scenery, the objects, and the incidents they describe, which thus visually inspired and wrought out his conceptions. Upon returning home he would go to bed, and while eating his breakfast dictate to an amanuensis.

To pass from the poets to the prose writers, Johnson's method was to thoroughly think out his subject before he put pen to paper, not only in its salient points, but word for word as it was to appear in print, which must have been a great effort of memory to begin with. Mr. Trevelyan gives the following account of how Macaulay wrote his history : "As soon as he had got into his head any particular episode in his history, he would sit down and write off the whole story at a headlong pace, sketching in the outlines under the genial and audacious impulse of a first conception, and securing in black and white each idea, and epithet, and turn of phrase, as it flowed straight from his busy brain to his rapid fingers. His manuscript, at this stage, to the eyes of anyone but himself, appeared to consist of column after column of dashes and flourishes, in which a straight line with a half-formed letter at each end and another in the middle, did duty for a word. . . . As soon as Macaulay had finished his rough draft, he began to fill it in at the rate of six sides of foolscap every morning ; written in so large a hand, and with such a multitude of erasures, that the whole six pages were on an average compressed into two pages of print. This portion he called his 'task,' and he was never quite easy unless he completed it daily. More he seldom sought to accomplish ; for he had learned by long experience that this was as much as he could do at his best ; and except at his best he never would write at all." He never wrote except he was in the humour, and stopped as soon as his thoughts ceased to flow fast. He never allowed a sentence to pass until it was as good as he could make it. He would recast a chapter to obtain a more lucid arrangement, and reconstruct a paragraph for the sake of one happy stroke or apt illustration. He spent nineteen days over his description of the Massacre of Glencoe, and then expressed dissatisfaction at the result.

There could be no more notable antithesis to this elaborate method than that of Sir Walter Scott. He wrote with marvellous rapidity ; his pen was never stopped by the want of a word. If it did not come readily he left a blank space and sped on to the rest. Correction was distasteful to him, and as the ideas flowed from his brain they were set down and never altered. He could write while children were

playing about the room, and amidst conversation or almost any disturbing influence.

Fanny Kemble, in the "Records of My Girlhood," tells a good story in illustration of this. "I can never forget the description Sir Adam Fergusson gave me of a morning he had passed with Scott at Abbotsford, which at that time was still unfinished, swarming with carpenters, painters, masons, and bricklayers, and surrounded with all the dirt and disorderly discomfort inseparable from the process of house-building. The room they sat in was in the roughest condition which admitted of their occupying it at all: the raw, new chimney smoked intolerably. Out of doors the place was one mass of bricks, mortar, scaffolding, tiles, and slates. A heavy mist shrouded the whole landscape of lovely Tweedside, and distilled in a cold, persistent, and dumb drizzle. Maida, the well-beloved staghound, kept fidgetting in and out of the room, Walter Scott every five minutes exclaiming, 'Eh, Adam, the puir beast's just wearyin' to get out;' or 'Eh, Adam, the puir creature's just crying to come in;' when Sir Adam would open the door to the raw, chilly air, for the wet, muddy hound's exit or entrance, while Scott, with his face swollen with a grievous toothache, and one hand pressed hard to his cheek, with the other was writing the inimitably humorous opening chapters of 'The Antiquary,' which he passed across the table sheet by sheet to his friend, saying, 'Now, Adam, d'ye think that'll do?'"

Contrast with this Lord Lytton's mode of working. His study, richly furnished in the Elizabethan style, was isolated from the rest of the house, so that the least noise, which would have irritated him in the extreme, might be intercepted. While writing, the floor around him would be strewn with books and papers, and so jealous was he of the privacy of this sanctum that few were ever admitted within its walls. In his latter days he never devoted more than three hours to composition. After partaking in abstracted silence of a light breakfast, he would enter his study at ten, and regularly as the clock struck one he would emerge, and his labours were finished for the day.

Dickens was a very methodical worker; his usual hours of writing were between breakfast and luncheon. But his marvellously active brain was ceaselessly employed in collecting materials. Nothing escaped his keen eye—not an odd name over a shop door, not a peculiar face, or a peculiar expression heard in passing through the streets, or the commonest incidents, whether appertaining to man or beast; all were absorbed into the vast store-house of his mind, to be blended with other reminiscences, or with original ideas; to be transused, sublimated, and reproduced in other forms thereafter.

This is Mrs. Gaskell's account of the Brontë sisters' mode of working: "It was the household custom among the girls to sew till nine o'clock at night. At that hour Miss Bramwell generally went to bed, and her nieces' duties were accounted done. They put away their work, and began to pace the room backwards and forwards, up and

down—as often with candles extinguished, for economy's sake as not—three figures glancing into the firelight and out into the shadow perpetually. In after years this was the time for discussing together the plots of their novels." It was not every day that Charlotte could write. Sometimes there were gaps of weeks and even months in the composition of "*Jane Eyre*." Then, some morning, she would wake with her mind full of ideas, and resume the thread of the narrative. They had an old servant, nearly eighty years of age, whose failing sight often left black specks in the potatoes she insisted upon peeling, and many a time did Charlotte lay down her pen, in the fulness of her inspiration, to remedy this culinary defect. She wrote her first draft in a minute hand upon scraps of paper, which she held against a piece of bookbinder's board as she sat in the firelight or up in bed at night.

One more sketch of a literary worker, perhaps, of all, the most extraordinary and unique. This time we take our illustration from a foreign source: it is Honoré de Balzac we are going to look in upon. Each of his novels, at least after he became great, was thoroughly thought out in all its ramifications before he put pen to paper. He would take a long journey to obtain the minutest point of a description, even of a street of a country town. As Dickens in London, so was he in Paris, ever in the streets, note-book in hand, ever piercing and penetrating into every class of society. When all the materials of his proposed work were amassed, he would retire from the outward world. Every visitor was refused admittance, letters were left unopened, even the daylight was shut out, and candles supplied its place. His ordinary costume was exchanged for a loose, white, monkish gown, Turkish trousers, and slippers. He rose at two A.M., and wrote from that time until six; then he took a bath, in which he remained meditating frequently for an hour; at eight he took coffee, rested for another hour, and then resumed his writing until noon; after which there was another hour's interval for *déjeuner*; from one to six he wrote again, dined, received his publisher, and went to bed at eight.

This kind of life sometimes endured for two months. When it came to an end he had accomplished only the first rough draft of the work. Sometimes it was almost entirely rewritten, chapters were transposed, expanded, altered. Then came the proofs, the margins of which were entirely covered with corrections; the revises, first, second, and sometimes third and fourth, were returned in a condition almost as illegible. He was the terror of printers; few could read his copy, and those who could made an express stipulation with their employer to work on it only one hour at a time. "I toil sixteen hours out of the twenty-four," he said, "over the elaboration of my unfortunate style, and I am never satisfied with it when it is done."

H. BARTON BAKER.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE three girls were going to spend a month at the seaside—Lydia, Rosa, and Julia Tafferel. Their aunt, Miss Hamlet, after keeping them in suspense for weeks—now up in the skies of hope, now down in the dust of despair—at length made up her mind, and announced her decision—to go. “But I’m sure,” she added, “I don’t know what will come of it.”

Charlotte Hamlet had thought fate rather cruel when, three years ago now, she heard of the death of her widowed sister, Mary Tafferel, and that the three daughters she left in the world had no protector, unless she herself became one. The girls had three hundred a year conjointly—that is, one hundred pounds each, and could have kept a home over their heads by living together; but they were young for that, and, Miss Hamlet suspected, somewhat giddy. She was well off herself, and had a roomy, pleasant house. It was not on that score she shrank from the prospect; but she was rather an invalid, nervous, and loving above all things a quiet life. However, there appeared to be no help for it, and she wrote to her nieces to come. “We must all have crosses,” murmured poor Miss Hamlet, “and I suppose this will become one for me; but I have been pretty free from them hitherto, and must not repine.”

The girls arrived at Stagbrook, Miss Hamlet’s village home. The eldest of them was twenty-three, the youngest twenty-one. They turned out to be pleasant, sociable, and chatty; full of life and spirits, eager for any gaiety that might fall in their way, and very anxious, each of the three, to pick up a husband.

“Small blame to them either,” freely spoke up Mrs. O’Malley, an intimate friend of Miss Hamlet’s. “What do girls expect but to marry? and sure the young men are growing scarce!”

Nearly three years had elapsed since they came to Miss Hamlet, and there had been no change, when that lady bethought herself of taking them to the seaside, and bade them prepare themselves.

To get away *anywhere* was something; but the place she had fixed upon, Brightwater, was new and untried, not a dozen houses as yet in it. A grand hotel was just built, the size of which might, perhaps, make up for the scarcity of other accommodation. It was called the Royal Victoria, and it took its guests by the week, somewhat as a boarding-house does, or after the fashion of Scarborough. Miss Hamlet had written to the Royal Victoria to make arrangements, Mrs. O’Malley, who had just returned from a fortnight’s sojourn there, having praised it warmly.

“It is not exactly what I like,” said Miss Hamlet to her nieces, as they sat at tea. “I have never tried the life myself, and I fear it will

prove to be too familiar ; but we can leave the hotel at the end of the first week for lodgings if we choose."

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte," exclaimed Rosa, "it will seem like Paradise after this dreadful Stagbrook."

"Dreadful Stagbrook !" repeated Miss Hamlet, gazing in amazement through her spectacles. "What do you mean by that, Rosa ?"

Rosa dropped her high tone. "Well, aunt, Stagbrook *is* dull ; you must know that."

"I have never found it so, young lady, and I have lived all my life in it."

"Yes, aunt ; I suppose that makes the difference. *We* did not think Chichester dull."

"I wish the holiday to be pleasant to you all," resumed Miss Hamlet, stiffly ; "and I shall take Dorothy Krane."

"Dorothy Krane !" screamed all the three girls in chorus. "Dolly Krane !"

"Yes ; why not ?" said Miss Hamlet. "She will be a pleasant companion for you."

"Why, Aunt Charlotte, Dolly won't have a decent thing to appear in !" exclaimed Lydia.

"She'll do very well. People are not expected to be fine at the sea-side. Fancy dressing up at an hotel !"

Lydia kicked Julia under the table, and Julia kicked Rosa. The young ladies were taking every smart thing they possessed, with enough ribbons and fal-lals to fill a trunk.

"Nearly all Dolly's dresses are cotton !"

"If they are they are delicate and pretty," said Miss Hamlet. "More sugar, do you say, Julia ? She has her grey silk for best ; now that it's turned it looks as good as new. And Dorothy tells me——"

"Have you been to the parsonage, Aunt Charlotte ?"

"Yes ; walked over this morning when you three went out shopping. Three hours you were gone ! I was back long before you came in. One would think you wanted something at every shop in Stagbrook."

"All the prints Dolly's got have been washed ever so many times, aunt."

"I daresay they have. They'll be just the things for the seaside. Then she has that pretty figured muslin that was new last year ; and for best, she has her white. Not that, as I believe, she will require to wear it. Dorothy asked me whether it had better be taken or not."

"The white has been washed too," cried Lydia. "I wonder Mr. and Mrs. Krane can spare her. How will the children get on without Dolly, Aunt Charlotte ?—and the parish ?—and the schools ?"

"As well as they can," answered Miss Hamlet. "All work and no play is not good for anybody—least good of all for the young. Dolly needs a change more than you do, and the tea-stand in Mr.

Krane's eyes when he thanked me for thinking of her. Another cup, Lydia?"

The church and parsonage stood half a mile from Stagbrook. The Reverend Abel Krane was the incumbent; a hard-working, conscientious man, with a flock of children, and a small income to keep them on. Dolly was the eldest; and she had to teach and take care of the others, not to speak of the running about in the parish, which she partly did for her mother, who was as hard-worked as the Rector. Mrs. Krane, formerly Dorothy Hamlet, was first cousin to Miss Charlotte Hamlet and to Mrs. Tafferel.

Brightwater was reached; and the Royal Victoria proved to be an imposing white mansion, with pillars and balconies and green blinds. Miss Hamlet found it very comfortable and liked it better than she had thought for.

A slight accident happened to her the day after her arrival. In stepping from a carriage, for she had treated the young people to a drive, she twisted her foot. It was nothing very serious, needing only a few days' rest. So Miss Hamlet reposed on one of the sofas near the window in the ladies' drawing-room, by day, feasting her eyes on the beautiful, ever-moving sea, and conversing placidly with another invalid lady, who had come to Brightwater to recover strength after an illness, and did not seem to be able to do it quickly.

For the girls this was just delightful. Not, of course, that they could rejoice over a twisted ankle, but it was pleasant to be able to go about without the supervision of Aunt Charlotte. The hotel was not half full, but it was enjoying itself. There was a little carpet-dancing, a little flirting, and short moonlight promenades in the hotel garden and on the beach.

One drawback the Miss Tafferels did find: not a soul of the male sex, then at the hotel, could be pronounced quite eligible. Three or four very young men, who were there with their mothers and sisters, and three or four middle-aged ones, who looked grave, and no doubt had wives at home, comprised the list. But the three sisters got a great deal of admiration; they were tall, stylish, and showy, with rather Spanish-looking faces, sparkling dark eyes, and blue-black hair. Their manners in society were perfect; their repartees delightful. "Three *charming* girls!" declared young Mr. Pender a dozen times a day, or as often as he could get away from his tutor. "Never saw such beauties!"

Dolly Krane was nowhere beside them: eclipsed as a pale star by the brilliant moon. She was pretty in her way, but of style she had none. She only about came up to Miss Lydia's shoulder; a slender girl, retiring in manner, shrinking from strangers, rather than courting them. Not but that her face was a very pleasant one: fair, gentle, with earnest blue eyes, ever smiling, and chiselled features; her fine, silky hair had a gold tinge on it. Dolly was kept

down by her imperious cousins; imperious to *her*; and remained in her place accordingly. She was accustomed to think of them as rich and fortunate young ladies, quite above herself. A sweet nature, a sunny temper, utterly unselfish, and ever ready to help all the world: such was Dolly Krane.

Three or four days after the ankle was injured, Miss Hamlet was able to use it again without much trouble, and she went in that evening, leaning upon Lydia's arm, to join the dinner in the public room.

"Dolly," cried the young lady in a tone of command, "you had better change your place for this one next to Aunt Charlotte. And then you will be at hand, you know, to help her to anything she may want."

Now, by a skilful arrangement of the mistress of the ceremonies, the elder people were placed together at the head of the table, and the younger ones at the foot; she had been young herself twenty years ago and knew what was what. And perhaps, a sort of disappointment crossed Dolly's heart at being called away from the lively company of her own age, to sit with the sober elders. The feeling passed in a moment. Dolly had only lived to serve others, not to indulge herself, and she sat down by Miss Hamlet with a loving smile and cheerful brow.

"Let it be your place for good, Dolly," said Lydia, as she moved away to her own.

"Now I daresay, my dear, you would rather have stayed down there," said Miss Hamlet.

"Indeed I am glad to be with you, Aunt Charlotte," replied Dolly—for she had always called Miss Hamlet "aunt." "Please let me stay."

But by that wonderful law of compensation said to exist in this world, while Dolly was taking her soup, there glided quietly into the vacant seat beside her a tall, handsome, distinguished-looking man, whose face Dolly liked at the first glance; took a fancy to, in fact. It was a very attractive face, its features pale and regular, eyes, hair and whiskers of a dark brown, and a slight brown moustache.

Dolly passed him the salt. He thanked her, and that broke the ice. He began to talk to her, talked with her throughout dinner, and spoke a little across Dolly to Miss Hamlet. His English was very good indeed—a slightly foreign accent being distinguishable at times; and now and then he hesitated for a word. Once he used a wrong word, and Dolly laughed.

"What is it, mademoiselle?" he asked, laughing also. "What ought I to have said?"

Dolly told him. Though a retiring, modest girl, of innate refinement, she had none of the foolish shyness that some young girls have when conversing with strange gentlemen, and that some affect to have. And—she did not know how it was—but she felt as much at home with him as though she had known him for ten

years. He could not be mistaken for anything but a gentleman, and he was certainly a very attractive one.

The Miss Tafferels, looking on from the other end of the table, turned green with envy. Miss Lydia wished she had taken the seat by her aunt, instead of giving it to Dolly. "I wonder who he is?" thought she. "I suppose he came in by the five o'clock train." And when the company left the dining-room, Lydia ran to get a sly peep at the visitors' book.

"The Baron de Fierreville."

"A baron! A real, live baron! French, of course!" Lydia Tafferel made a rush to her sisters, her cheeks glowing with excitement. There would be somebody worth dressing for now.

And from that evening the three young girls dressed in all their best. Feathers and flounces wonderful to behold, silks and ribbons and laces; and, though some people might have deemed them a little over-dressed, they looked very well.

The Baron de Fierreville did not appear in the drawing-rooms that first evening; but the young ladies made his acquaintance the following morning. It was a very hot day; they and Dolly were sitting on the beach under an awning, when he came strolling along with young Mr. Pender.

"Oh, there are those charming girls!" cried the young man. "Do let us join them!"

"You must present me, then," said the Baron.

Accordingly young Mr. Pender presented him—"The Baron de Fierreville." The three young ladies made each an elaborate curtsey: Dolly blushed and smiled.

But fate was not kind to young Mr. Pender. It came in the shape of his envious tutor to call him away. A grim tutor, who would not always be put down. So the young gentleman was borne off, and the Baron was left alone with the ladies. He sat down by Rosa, and they began to talk to him—all three of them, their questions tumbling out one upon another. There was no room for Dolly to put in a word, even had she wished to.

"How do you like Brightwater, Baron?"

"Don't you find the bathing excellent?"

"Why did you not come in to join the little dance last evening?"

"Do you like English girls?"

"How long do you think of staying?"

"I suppose you don't know all the people here yet? Those Miss Fitzroys are very nice. They had on blue net at dinner yesterday; perhaps you noticed them. Their father is Sir John Fitzroy, a half-pay colonel or admiral, or something: that old gentleman with a long white beard and a bald head."

"How very well you speak English, Baron! Did you come to England to learn it?"

"Are you a good sailor? I am a dreadful one."

"Do you like cruising about in a yacht?"

"Were you ever at Brighton?"

"In what part of France do you live?"

These and a hundred other queries the young ladies poured out. Dolly felt uncomfortable and blushed frequently. She could not have put such questions for the world; did not know how her cousins liked to do it. The Baron laughed and answered freely—as freely as the torrent of words permitted.

He had landed yesterday from a friend's yacht; had come over in her from Dieppe; his friend, Captain Close, after landing him, had put off again, was going further up the coast; he did not see, as yet, much to like in Brightwater, but believed he did like English girls; had noticed the young ladies in blue and thought them pretty; had sat outside in the moonlight last night smoking a cigar and talking with the young fellow's tutor, who had just left them; found him a most intellectual man; and so stayed there instead of going in to dance; his home was in Normandy, but for the past year he had been much away from it, travelling.

The girls listened eagerly to this, the substance of his answers. Lydia would have much liked to ask him how old he was, and whether he was a poor man or a rich one; but that would have been going a little too far, even for her.

"You have not told us, Baron," she said, "how you learnt to speak English so correctly. You have scarcely any accent at all. Did you learn it in England?"

"No, I learnt it at home: my mother was English," he answered.

"She brought an English maid with her when she first came to our country, and when I was born the maid became my nurse. She is with us still—poor old Hannah!"

"At home, with your mother, do you mean?"

"Ah, no," he replied, a sadness creeping into his tone. "My mother is dead: nobody is in the old place now—save the servants. When I am at home now I am alone."

The young ladies noticed that he was in slight mourning, and concluded that he wore it for his mother. The conversation was becoming eminently satisfactory, for was not this an explicit avowal that the Baron was a bachelor. Lydia's lips had been twitching to ask whether he was or not, but it was perhaps too home a question and might have been misconstrued: and now it was answered without asking! How lucky! When men get to be thirty years of age—and he looked to be as much as that—one could never be at any certainty.

"Your father, I gather, is also dead, then, Baron?" she began again.

"He died many years ago."

The Baron got up and stepped away; perhaps he was tired of being asked questions; took a small telescope from his pocket, and stood

looking at the sea. Presently he put it up again, turned back to the bench, and sat down at the other end; which brought him next to Dolly. She was knitting a sock, and he began talking to her about it.

"For a little brother or sister, perhaps, mademoiselle?"

"Yes," said Dolly, her blue eyes brightening with the success of the guess, as she raised them to his. "I knit all the socks for two or three of the little ones. It is cheaper than buying, and they last longer."

"You have two or three brothers, then—or sisters, are they?"

"I have ever so many," laughed Dolly. "Four brothers, and four sisters; we are nine in all."

"Are you the eldest of them?"

"Yes, the very oldest. The four boys come after me, and then the little girls. Mamma often says she is thankful that I came before the boys."

"But why?"

"Oh, because I can help her; I can do so much for them all. A boy could not have done anything."

"So you are a very industrious young lady!"

"I have to be," said Dolly simply. "And oh, you don't know—you can't guess—how delightful it is to have a holiday, and to be at the seaside. I never saw the sea before; and now I wish I could always see it."

Dolly spoke out in her enthusiasm. Her eyes were bent on her knitting; she was thinking of home. The Baron's eyes were bent on her; and the other girls saw it.

"You had better go in now, Dolly," said Miss Lydia. "Aunt Charlotte may be wanting you." And Dolly took up her ball of wool, and went slowly off, knitting as she went.

"She is not your sister, is she, that young lady?" asked the Baron.

"Oh dear, no!" they all screamed at once, wondering at the little discernment of men, even of real French barons. They displayed an elaborate toilette in all the fashion of the day; Dolly had nothing on but a pink gingham, already washed to paleness. Their head-gear was bristling with feathers and steel bugles and cockatoo tufts; Dolly's straw hat had a bit of ribbon twisted round it. "Our sister! My dear Baron! how could you! She is only Dorothy Krane, a very distant cousin."

"Dorothy Krane," repeated the Baron. "Krane?"

"Yes, rather an odd name, is it not?—spelt with a K. We call her Dolly."

When Miss Hamlet heard that the newly arrived guest was a French baron she felt doubtful. "I think," she observed to her nieces, "that you had better not cultivate any acquaintance with him. He was very pleasant and affable last night at the dinner table; but it is well to hold foreigners at a distance."

"Good gracious, aunt!" exclaimed the young ladies. "Why, we have been talking to him out there all the morning!" For this conversation occurred on this same day when they came in at luncheon time.

"Especially foreign noblemen," went on Miss Hamlet; "barons and counts, and such like. It happens sometimes that the titles are only put on, and that those who assume them are but adventurers. I have heard tell of such things."

"Now, Aunt Charlotte! *can* you suppose such a thing of this one? His very looks, his manners might tell you he is a perfect gentleman."

"Some years ago, Lydia, a foreigner came to Stagbrook, and took the best rooms in the place. I forget his name; in fact, none of us ever quite got at its true pronunciation; it sounded like Crassaco, and that is what we called it—the Count de Crassaco. He seemed to be a gentleman, also perfect, as you phrase it, with black moustachios that curled upwards, and a lisp. He stayed three months in the place, the young villain, making love to all the girls, and winning their brothers' money at pool, and cards, and billiards; and he ran away at last without paying for his rooms, or for any of the provisions that had been furnished by the tradespeople. Now that's true, girls; and I have suspected titled foreigners ever since."

The girls laughed. "Did he make love to you, Aunt Charlotte?"

"No, I was too old for him, I expect," said Aunt Charlotte good-humouredly. "I was between thirty and forty then: it must be fifteen years ago. But that is all true, I say. I would have you bear it in mind, and not allow this Baron de Feverel to drift into any intimacy with you."

"De Fierreville, aunt; not Feverel."

"It comes to the same. For the matter of that, it may not be his name at all. Just recollect one thing, my dears, that he is here without any introduction—any friend to answer for him or countenance him."

"He landed from Captain Close's yacht, he told us," remarked Rosa.

"Just so," said the elder lady; "but Captain Close—if there is such a person—did not stay to confirm this, or his yacht either. He may have landed from the excursion steamer; one touched here yesterday afternoon, you know; and not from any yacht at all. What are you looking so serious about, Dolly?"

"I was only thinking, Aunt Charlotte, that he *is* what he seems—what he says," replied Dolly. "He has a truthful face and voice; I don't think he *could* be deceitful. And I was also trying to recollect where I have heard the name—*dé Fierreville*. When young Mr. Pender mentioned it this morning, it struck me as being somehow not quite strange to me."

"Any way, I desire that you will all be upon your guard," concluded Aunt Charlotte.

To which advice the Miss Tafferels took care not to listen. "Dolly's right in that. You can't doubt him," they said to one another. "If a prince came down here, aunt, in her old-fashioned notions, would tell us not to dance with him!"

And henceforth the three Miss Tafferels took the Baron under their especial charge. Other young ladies staying at the hotel could hardly get near him. They sat by him at dinner, Dolly being displaced—Lydia to-day, Rosa to-morrow, Julia the next day. They surrounded him in the day time; they talked to him under the light of the moon. Twice over they got him to take them for a sail. One thing they did not yet succeed in—getting him to dance. When the quadrilles and waltzes were going on at night, the Baron would be out of doors with that objectionable tutor, who was over middle age and wore spectacles. The Miss Tafferels did not like the learned man at all. What right had musty old scholars to be at a gay watering-place?

Another who did not much frequent the dancing-room was Dolly; but this was no fault of hers. Miss Hamlet disapproved of indiscriminate dancing, as she did of indiscriminate flirting; and Dolly was only allowed to sit by and look on. "Your papa would not approve of it, any more than I do, my dear," said Miss Hamlet, evening by evening, to Dolly.

The Baron accepted the patronage of the Miss Tafferels calmly, giving as much attention to one sister as to another. Being the Baron de Fierreville (unless Miss Hamlet's doubts were true), and a very good-looking and agreeable man, the chances were that he was no stranger to the homage of young ladies.

Thus a week wore on. Miss Hamlet, finding her nieces did *not* keep the Baron at a respectful distance, in spite of her advice, washed her hands of them for giddy, silly girls, and rather hoped that some fine morning, upon getting up, it would be found that the Baron had disappeared during the night, as well as the hotel forks and spoons. It would teach them what foreigners were worth.

"You, Dolly, will at any rate obey me," Miss Hamlet said, "and keep yourself out of the way of that Frenchman." But Dolly had no need of the injunction. She felt so ashamed of the way her relatives set upon him, that she never willingly went within range of his sight, putting aside the fact that the Miss Tafferels took care she should not go.

Some days went on. One morning, when the sun was pouring down on the beach, the three girls stood there, hoping for the presence of the Baron. Presently he loomed into view, side by side with that silent, uninteresting, spectacled tutor.

"Is it not hot, Baron?" exclaimed Lydia.

"Very," replied the Baron. "It will be broiling by-and-by."

"But you say you don't care for the heat, you know," put in Rosa.

"You say you like it."

"I like hot weather; it is nearly sure to be sunny weather. Some-

times it is too hot for me. We now and then get quite tropical heat here, just a few days of it; not every summer, though."

"We had some of it last year, I remember," said Julia. "It was in June."

"I remember it, too," he slowly replied, his eyes taking a thoughtful look over the sea. "We were in Switzerland. It was hot; we could hardly bear it."

"You say 'we,' Baron," commented Miss Lydia. "Are you speaking of your mother?"

"Oh, no. Of my wife."

"Your—wife?" repeated Lydia, in a kind of choking tone. "Did you say your *wife*?"

"Yes," he answered, turning to her. "My poor mother died long before that."

Now I will leave the intelligent reader to judge of the effect this avowal had on the Baron's fair hearers. He went strolling farther down the beach with the tutor, and the three young ladies made their comments.

"What a *shameful* thing!"

"To be staying here under *false* pretences!"

"Aunt Charlotte is right. These foreigners are nearly all of them *pretenders*."

"He has come cruising off in that yacht from Dieppe to amuse himself, leaving his poor wife to the solitude of the château! And he flirts here and flirts there, never giving the smallest hint that he is a married man—*suppressing* it, in fact. Oh, it is infamous!"

"Stay a moment, Lydia. Don't you remember he said one day he was alone at home; that the château contained only two or three old servants?"

"It is all of a piece," retorted Lydia. "He is starrng it here under false colours. And if his wife is not left to the home solitude, she is starrng it somewhere upon her own account, take my word for that. Small blame to her, as Mrs. O'Malley says. Serves him right! Well, I do hate and despise deliberate deceit! A special pillory ought to be invented for it."

The young ladies went indoors. In a tacit sort of way they united to hide their mortification, and to say nothing of the discovery. Let some of the other girls get taken in! As if to reward their magnanimity, a troop of fresh male guests arrived that day at the hotel, two of them looking particularly eligible; so the Baron was left in peace by the Miss Taferels.

The following morning, when they had gone for a drive with their aunt, Dolly took her knitting and sat down under the awning on the beach. It was a lovely day, not quite so hot as yesterday; the sun shone on the sands, but it was tempered by a breeze that blew over the sea. Children were playing about, young men and women strolled by the rocks, picking up shells and seaweed. Out at sea, a few

white sails glittered in the sun ; a distant steamer passed smoothly along, seeming to touch the horizon. A dainty yacht was making towards the little landing-place ; some fishing smacks were putting out. It was a charming picture of life at the sea-shore ; a life which is healthy because it is pleasant, and pleasant in that it is lazy.

"Oh, how delightful it is !" breathed Dolly aloud, when she had gazed long at the scene. "If I could but see it always ! If we did but live near the sea !"

"Sometimes the sea is gloomy and rough," said a voice at her elbow. "How would you like it then, Miss Krane ?"

He came into view from behind the awning, and sat down, the Baron de Fierreville, startling Dolly. She had seen him go off by an omnibus after breakfast, and did not know he was back again.

"I think I should like it always," she answered, with deprecation. "Rough or smooth, the sea must be always beautiful. We cannot have fair weather every day, and must take the bad with the good."

"Ay ; that's philosophy. How is it that you have run away from me of late ?"

Dolly blushed to the tips of her busy fingers. "I have a good deal to do for Aunt Hamlet ; she wants me to read to her, and to give her my arm when she walks," answered Dolly.

"Where are your cousins this morning ?"

"They are gone out for a drive with my aunt."

"Was there not room for you ?"

"Not any," said Dolly. "I should have made five. It would have crushed their new cambric dresses."

Dolly's dress this morning was a simple cotton with pretty blue sprigs upon it. The Baron sat in silence for a few moments looking at her, so unpretending, so fresh and fair, with her clear, pleasant face shaded by its beautiful hair.

"Do you like your cousins ?" he asked.

"Oh, very much. They are truly kind, and they give me a great many things. Did you notice—but of course you did not. How foolish I am !"

"Now please tell me what you were going to say, Miss Krane. Did I notice what ?"

Dolly blushed again. "You must forgive me ; I spoke without thought. It was only whether you happened to notice a new silk dress I came down to dinner in yesterday. Julia gave it me. It was hers, and she said I might alter it for myself, for people must be tired of seeing me in the grey. Oh, they are very kind, very nice ; you would like them better and better the more you knew of them."

"They are rich, I suppose ?"

"Well, yes : rich, at least, as compared with me. Aunt Charlotte says they are giddy and talk too much," added Dolly, hoping to

offer an excuse for the young ladies' behaviour to her hearer. "But they will remedy that, you know, as they get older."

The Baron laughed. "You young ladies don't put old heads on your shoulders yet awhile, do you, Miss Krane? Why, I suppose you are not more than nineteen?"

Dolly looked up in surprise. "I am twenty-two."

He suppressed a smile.

"Is your father a clergyman?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes. He is the Rector of Stagbrook."

"The Reverend Abel Krane?"

"Yes," repeated Dolly, wondering.

"I thought it might be so; the name, Krane, is not a very common one, you see. I believe I know him. Rather more than a year ago he was doing duty in Switzerland. I was staying there, and made acquaintance with him."

"It is quite true!" said Dolly, her face beaming with delight. "Papa had nearly broken down with the home work, and somebody kindly got him a chaplaincy abroad for a month, and he went there with mamma. And I am sure now that I have heard him mention you. I thought the name was familiar to my ears. How glad I am!"

Dolly could not have defined why she was glad: partly, perhaps, at meeting some one who knew her father; partly at the conviction this brought her that Miss Hamlet's doubts were without foundation, that the Baron was what he appeared to be.

"And now you will no longer be afraid of me, or look upon me as a five-tailed bashaw," quoth he, smiling.

Dolly blushed hotly. "Did you see much of papa?—did you like him?"

"I liked him, indeed; but I did not see much of him. I was at the place but a week or ten days."

"Halloa, de Fierreville! Won't you come for a sail? It's a glorious day for it."

The interruption was made by some of the gentlemen staying at the hotel. The Baron rose, said good morning to Dolly, and went to them.

Dolly found herself quite at liberty now to stroll out when she would, and to talk to the Baron, if he chose to talk to her; her cousins no longer interfered to prevent it. Very often indeed, when she was sitting on the beach, or under the rocks, or strolling on the sands to pick up shells for the young ones at home, did he join her; and somehow Dolly grew to love the meetings.

One evening at sunset a yacht put in. Its owner, Captain Close, came to the hotel and found his friend the Baron. After dinner, when Miss Hamlet was sitting out of doors in the soft twilight, a fleecy white shawl on her shoulders, Captain Close, throwing away the end of his cigar, chanced to sit down in the next chair.

"You are not with the dancers, sir," said Miss Hamlet, wishing to be sociable.

"Not to night, ma'am. The young ladies might hardly care to dance with a man in a rough pilot jacket. I only came up to find de Fierreville, and did not put myself ship-shape."

All in a moment it struck Miss Hamlet that she could not do better than question this sailor, with the frank speech and honest, weather-beaten face, about the Baron. And she did so.

"Is he what he passes for, would you ask?" repeated Captain Close, in much surprise, when he had listened. "He is George, Baron de Fierreville just as surely as that I am Richard Close, commander in Her Majesty's navy—for I am not captain yet, worse luck, though people give me the title on shore. Why, what else did you take him for, ma'am?"

Miss Hamlet made a few apologies, explaining a little that cautious people did not, as a rule, put absolute trust in barons and counts, when they were unknown; that such gentlemen lived by their wits; and she wound up by asking whether the Baron in question was poor.

"That's as may be; people's notions on riches differ, you must know, ma'am," said the sailor. "The Fierreville estates bring in two thousand pounds clear yearly; and that's an uncommon good income for France, though it might not be thought much of here at home. Added to that, there was a great deal of money that had accumulated between the late Baron's death and this one's coming of age, which is placed, as I chance to know, in good securities. Oh, yes, he is well off; wish I had half as much."

"You appear to know him well, sir."

"I do, ma'am; have known him ever since he was in petticoats. There was some distant relationship between my people and his late mother, who was a Close before she married; though I'll be shot if I know what it was; and I've often stayed at Château Fierreville. It's a fine place."

All this was genuine truth; and Miss Hamlet, wishing to be just, informed her three nieces, before going to bed, that she found she had misjudged the Baron, who was a real baron and not an adventurer.

The young ladies threw their heads into the air. "All the same," they said to one another, "he is doing Brightwater under abominably false colours."

Early the next morning Captain Close's yacht went out, carrying the Baron with it. And he had never condescended to take leave of anybody! "Just the manners that might be expected of him!" exclaimed Lydia.

Dolly was pacing the terrace in the twilight, feeling very down at heart, for which she could not at all account, the others being in the dancing-room, when she saw the Baron approach from the

beach. At first she was not sure but it might be his ghost ; and what with that, or something else, every pulse she possessed began to beat at fever-heat.

"I thought you had left," she said, timidly.

"Surely not ! We have been out for a day's sail. Close wants to carry me off to-morrow for good," he added, "but I tell him I am not ready."

Dolly looked up at the stars, just making their appearance in the sky. She had nothing to say in answer. He had turned to walk by her side.

"How much longer will your party be staying here, do you suppose, Miss Krane ?"

"Only two or three days," sighed Dolly. "We have been here nearly four weeks."

"Shall you be sorry to leave ?"

"Oh, very. For some things," added Dolly, quickly—"the sea, and the holiday life. But I shall be very glad to go home again. I cannot think what my mother has done without me."

"What will she do without you—later ?"

"Later !" echoed Dolly, not understanding.

"When you marry."

Hot blushes dyed her cheeks. "That will never be," she answered, when she could speak quietly. "I am not likely to marry."

"Do you think not ? Why ?"

"I do not suppose anybody will ask me."

"But why not, Miss Dolly ? Come, please tell me."

"For one thing, there is not anybody in Stagbrook who would be in the least likely to—I can't remember one—not that I have thought about it—or—at all suitable," stammered Dolly, obedient, as usual, but wishing he would not say things to confuse her. "And for another thing——" She came to a standstill.

"Well, what is the other thing ?"

"I mean that I have not any money ; not any at all. You must pardon me for saying these things. I don't care to speak of them—if you will please not to question me."

He laughed a little. "How would you like to live in France ?" he asked. "In a large and pleasant house not far from the sea—which can be seen from its windows."

The tone he spoke in was very peculiar—curiously tender ; and Dolly blushed hotly.

"I—I must go in," she said. "Aunt Charlotte will be angry with me."

But the Baron did not let her go. He caught her hand as she was turning, and stood holding it in his.

"Why do you want to run away from me, Miss Dolly ? Do you know that I left Close and the yacht on purpose to come to *you* ? Let me tell you a little about this house in France."

Four or five young men loomed on the terrace, smoking their cigars. Seeing the Baron, they called to him, and Dolly escaped indoors.

"Come back, has he?" commented Miss Lydia Tafferel. "He might have stayed away, for all the ornament he is here, or the good he does us."

"My dear, don't be severe," reproved Aunt Charlotte. "At one time you seemed, all three of you, to think the Baron was an angel, if I may apply the word to a young man. Latterly you have been almost rude to him."

"Well, aunt, and with cause. Here he came, flourishing amidst us, never saying who he was or what he was; passing himself off for a bachelor——"

"Stay a moment, Lydia. You talk too fast. How did he 'pass himself off' for a bachelor? I suppose you mean that you girls took up the notion that he was one?"

"Anyway, he did not say he was a married man," fired Lydia. "He ought to have let it be known that he was. It was a piece of audacious deceit."

"Is he married?"

"He is. He began talking to us the other day about his wife."

"And pray, my dears, what possible difference can it make to you whether he is married or not?" demanded Aunt Charlotte, looking at them over her spectacles. "You would not, any one of you, think of a French baron for yourselves, I expect—not even you, Lydia."

"*Of course not!*" retorted Lydia, with emphasis. "You don't understand things, Aunt Charlotte. The world is becoming too much advanced for you."

"I think its young people are," retorted Aunt Charlotte; and she said no more. But Dolly, listening to this from a distant corner, turned as white as a sheet. Her dream was over.

So that she was not very much pleased when she saw the Baron coming towards her the following afternoon. Dolly had her full share of good sense, as of proper pride, and she knew that the Baron de Fierreville, a married man, had not spoken to her like a gentleman the previous evening on the terrace; no, nor at one or two other times. Miss Hamlet and the girls were gone for a drive again. Dolly did not often get a chance of going; and she took the zig-zag, circuitous path to a seat in the middle of the rocks—a solitary place, rarely invaded by the visitors. But the Baron must have watched her, for presently she saw him climbing up perpendicularly. Fright put other things out of her head.

"Oh, pray, pray do not try to come up that way!" she cried out in an agony, expecting every moment to see him fall backwards. "Oh, why will you do it?"

But he gained the ledge and the seat without mishap. There were rocks near his own home, and he had climbed them from a child.

"Did you fear for me?" he asked in a low, sweet tone.

Dolly was very pale. "I thought it a hazardous thing to do," she answered. "I think it still."

"But I wanted to come to you. I want to tell you about my home in France—we were interrupted by those men last night. Do you think you should feel altogether unhappy if I asked you to come and live in it with me, Miss Dolly?"

Dolly put her work into its little basket, and rose from her seat to depart. "Baron de Fierreville," she stayed to say, her very lips becoming whiter, "will you allow me to ask what your wife would think of this, could she hear you?"

"But she can't hear me," said the Baron, staring.

Dolly burst into tears of agitation. "Be so good as to let me pass, sir. I took you for a gentleman; I did indeed; and you told me you knew and esteemed my father!"

"But what do you mean?" he asked, in astonishment. "How have I offended you?"

"It has been all very bad—on your part," retorted Dolly, in trembling accents. "To excuse yourself by saying to my face that your wife cannot hear you is worst of all."

"Why, how can she hear?" persisted the Baron. "The Roman Catholics believe that the saints and angels hear our prayers: I am not sure but we Protestants do. If my poor wife could hear every word I have ever said to you, she would rejoice rather than be sad. Nearly the last words she breathed to me contained a hope that I should find another wife to love me as she had loved."

It was now Dolly's turn to stare, as she took in what this implied. "Is your wife dead?" she faltered.

"She will have been dead a year on the thirtieth of this month," said the Baron. "Did you not know she was dead?"

"No," gasped Dolly, "I heard last night that she was living. Please forgive me for showing anger."

He drew her back to the seat beside him, put his arm round her waist, perhaps by way of support, and let her have her cry out.

"Your father and mother could have told you, my dear, that when they saw my wife with me in Switzerland she was nearly in the last stage of consumption. All hope of recovery was then over. And, Dolly, I feel sure they like me; I think they will not mind your coming home to the château."

For the first time that evening the Baron appeared in the dancing-room. He approached Dolly sitting nearly behind the window-curtain. "You will give me a dance," he whispered.

"I do not know what Aunt Charlotte would say," breathed Dolly in answer.

"I will make peace with Aunt Charlotte. Come! Why," laughing, as she still hesitated, "a short while, and you will have to obey me of right. Remember that, my darling."

Nobody could believe their eyes. The Baron in the room at last, treading a measure with Dolly Krane! With Dolly Krane, of all people! The measure was a waltz, and Dolly's pretty white skirts, for she had put on her best robe that evening, floated about her as she moved round in the Baron's arms, and her eyes were cast down timidly, and her face was blushing.

Miss Hamlet had never been so much surprised in all her life as she was that evening, when, being alone in the little card-room, she found the Baron de Fierreville, bowing deeply before her, à la mode Française, telling her that Dolly had promised to be his wife. And that when she, Miss Hamlet, left Brightwater with the young ladies the next day but one, he should beg permission to accompany them on his way to Stagbrook Rectory, to explain matters to the Reverend Mr. Krane and his wife, and to ask them to part with Dolly.

"A French baron!" gasped Miss Hamlet to her nieces, when they got into the privacy of her own room. "Oh dear! I said I did not know what would come of it."

The young ladies turned all manner of colours, and made their comments on the Baron with characteristic freedom.

"Not married!" they shrieked in chorus. "A widower! His wife been dead a year!—why, then, did he lead people to suppose she was *not* dead?—to speak of her, as he once did to us, as *living*? Oh, what a wicked man!—an accomplished deceiver! We wish you joy of your prize, Dorothy Krane!"



CAKES AND ALE.

BACK, back, three hundred years to scenes romantic,
 "The spacious times of Great Elizabeth!"
 Fresh blows the breeze across the blue Atlantic,
 With "Westward Ho!" to glory or to death.
 Talk flows at Court in softest "Sydneyan showers,"
 Not yet is Essex' doom or Raleigh's fall—
 And see, he comes, through English meadow flowers,
 Will Shakspeare, worthiest, dearest loved of all!

Where'er he deigns to lead we gladly follow,
 In court or camp we dream of love and war;
 Stray, where the ocean ridges, breaking hollow,
 Cast Naples' Prince upon the enchanted shore.
 Of love and war! we catch young whispering voices
 Mixed with the music in Verona gay;
 Or join the shout when England's host rejoices
 For Victory, won upon St. Crispin's day!

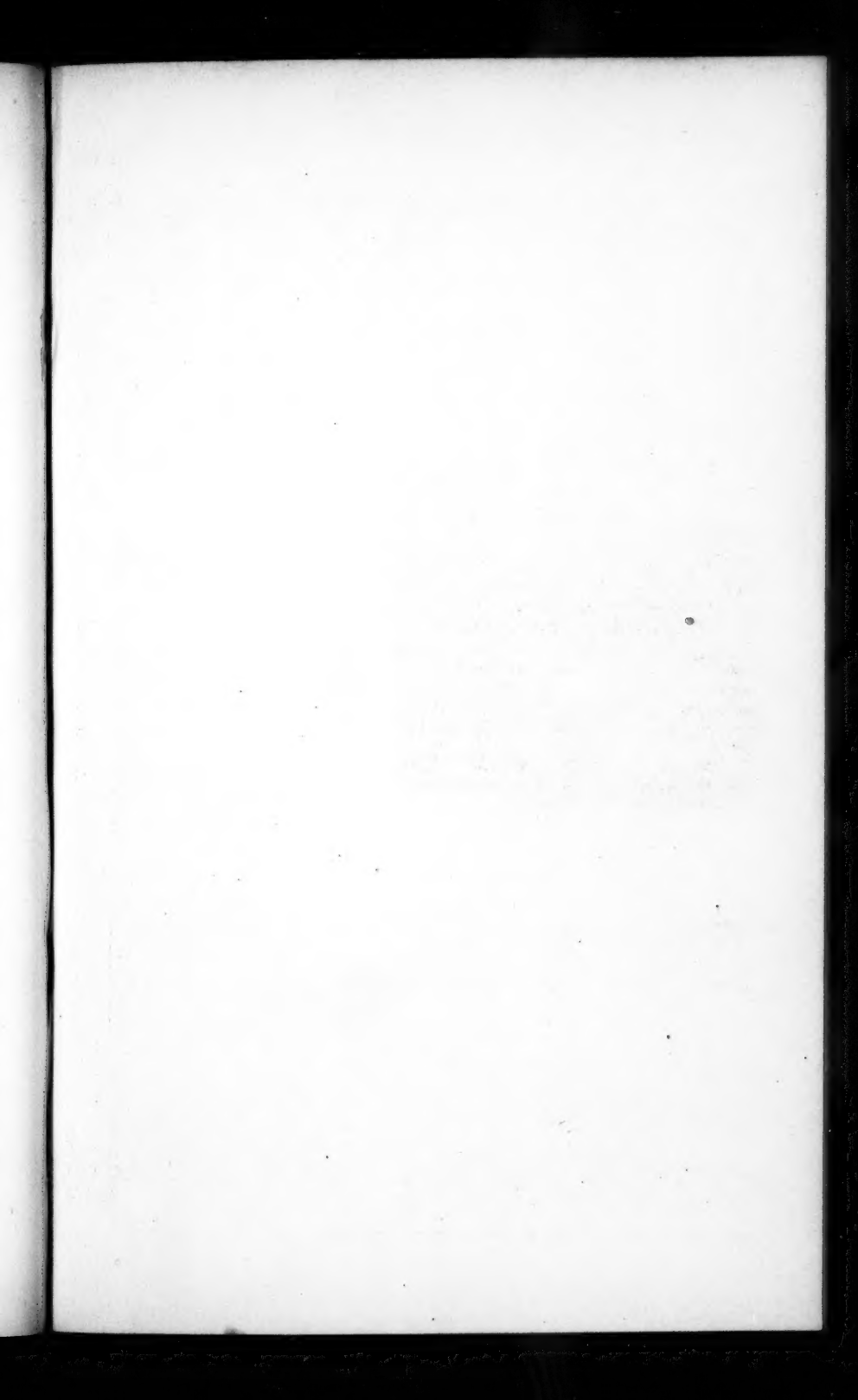
See in what goodly company he sets us:
 Ladies and courtiers, why, we know them all!
 Their doors stand open wide, and nothing lets us,
 Would we in palace hold high festival—
 'Mid fair Italian gardens take our leisure
 In gay companionship of Prince or Peer:
 Or rather taste the simpler-minded pleasure
 Of humble cakes and ale and country cheer.

Ay, this in faith is very gracious fooling!
 Let us sit down and view the world at ease;
 Prince Hal is here, not yet grown sage with ruling,
 We drink 'neath Justice Shallow's apple-trees.
 Let the October brew be brisk and mellow,
 Sir John, Sir Toby will be here anon;
 Bring out the warden pies, stained saffron yellow,
 And sinnels set with raisins o' the sun.

Gay times are these! we win a graceful greeting
 From Perdita among her shepherd train,
 Watch the Athenian actors' woodland meeting,
 And bid the gentle Lion "roar again!"
 Gay times indeed! with laughter still in favour,
 Jest not yet proscribed without the pale;
 Were they less virtuous that they liked the flavour,
 Our Foresires, of these merry Cakes and Ale?

The lines were broader, clearer for your guiding,
 Lasses and lads, three hundred years ago—
 You laughed for joy of heart and wept for chiding,
 Your lives in simpler channels seemed to flow.
 We school our faces, teach our tongues to utter
 Smooth things, not always Truth's unvarnished tale;
 In fact we've grown too fine for bread and butter,
 And far too virtuous for Cakes and Ale!

G. B. STUART.





M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

AT MOAT GRANGE.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.